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Jack Wright

And His Electric Air Rocket;

OR,

The Boy Exile of Siberia.

By "NONAME."



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Jack Wright and His Electric Air Rocket; OR, THE BOY EXILE OF SIBERIA.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "Jack Wright and His Flying Phantom," "Jack Wright and His Electric Cab," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A LIFE FOR GOLD.

"I SHALL kill you, Ivan Janova!"

The big man's tones were cruel and merciless and sent a cold chill of horror through the boy whom he clutched by the throat.

It was just at twilight, and they stood on the rocks towering above Wrightstown bay in a lonely, unfrequented spot, surrounded by trees.

Both the man and boy were Russians, for they spoke that language.

The huge fellow was clad in rough, cheap clothing, his dark, sinister face was covered by a bushy black beard, and he wore a cap on his thick black hair.

His victim could not have been over sixteen years old—a refined looking boy, clad in stylish clothing, his round features blanched with fear and his blue eyes protruding from the choking he was getting.

The little fellow was down upon one knee, both of his hands raised to the man's sinuous fingers that pressed upon his throat as the glowering villain stood over him, clutching a dagger in his other hand.

It was a thrilling scene.

The poor boy did not have enough strength to tear that strangling grip from his throat, and the murderous look that hideously contorted the man's dark features clearly showed how earnest he was.

For a moment a deep silence ensued, broken only by the stentorian breathing of the boy and the rustling of the tree leaves.

Then the man raised the dagger to stab his victim.

"Don't!" gasped the little fellow, piteously. "I have never done you any harm, Peter Darinka! Why should you kill me?"

"You alone stand between me and the title and estates of the Janova family!" hissed the man. "Once you are out of the way, both shall be mine! I have followed you all the way from St. Petersburg to do this, and now—die, you whelp!"

He lifted the dagger higher to plunge it into the trembling boy's heart.

Before he could carry out his desperate intention, though, there sounded the rushing patter of footsteps behind him.

The next moment an iron-like fist shot out, a sledge hammer blow caught the villain on the face, and as a yell of pain and alarm escaped him he was knocked flat on his back!

"You scoundrel!" cried a ringing, manly voice. "Take that for your deviltry! I'll teach you to murder little, helpless boys!"

And the speaker, boiling with indignation, kicked the knife out of Peter Darinka's hand, seized him by the neck, pulled him to his feet, and gave him another thump that almost flattened his nose.

Ivan bounded to his feet uttering a cry of joy over his salvation, and with a volley of oaths the big Russian sped away.

The boy cast a grateful glance at his rescuer, and observed that he was a magnificently-built young man, clad in neat clothing, and having a face that showed great kindness and courage.

He was not handsome—on the contrary, he was rather an ordinary dark-eyed fellow, with rather intelligent, thin features, but it was very evident that what he lacked in beauty he compensated for in courage.

"God bless you, sir!" the boy exclaimed in the Russian language, as he could not speak English. "You have saved my life from that villain. I can scarcely thank you enough."

"Who was he?" asked the young man in the Russian tongue, very much to Ivan's surprise and delight.

"My own cousin—Peter Darinka."

"Why did he try to kill you?"

"To succeed my possession of a title and the estates of my grandfather in St. Petersburg. Both he and I are the only heirs. My father and his mother were brother and sister. He just said so. He also stated that he had followed me all the way here from Russia in order to kill me."

"Indeed! And how came you to be alone here with him?"

"Very likely it was a scheme of his to lure me to a place where he could put me out of the way without being detected."

"Why do you think so?"

"Because when I was at the hotel in New York, where I am stopping, I received a letter saying that my life was in danger from Peter Darinka. I always feared that man, and believed the warning, as he had come over in the same steamer with me. The letter further said that if I would come to this spot, my anonymous correspondent would reveal to me a dastardly plot against my life. I complied. But I had not been here long when Darinka appeared. He rushed at me, stifled my voice by choking me, and was just going to kill me, when you appeared."

"Yes. It must have been a trap he laid for you. And what, may I ask, brought you to New York from Russia?"

"My father died and left me a small sum of money. As it was not enough to keep me in idleness, I determined to come to this country to secure employment. I arrived in New York two days ago."

"I see. But is your grandfather dead, whose heir you are?"

"Yes. He died while I was crossing the ocean," replied Ivan. "This I learned from his notary, who telegraphed me to return and lay claim to the title and fortune he left. Now, sir, may I ask your name?"

"It is Jack Wright," answered the young man, with a smile. "I am an inventor, and live in the village at the

head of the bay. I was out for a stroll with my little son, when I saw your peril and ran here. As your enemy is gone you had better return to New York and——"

But just then a piercing shriek in a childish voice interrupted Jack, and recognizing the tones, he involuntarily cried:

"Good heavens, it's my little boy!"

The scream came from the direction of the water.

Jack made a frantic rush for the spot, but had not gone more than ten yards when he tripped over a stone and fell.

His head struck a projecting piece of granite, half stunning him, and his ankle got a wrench, spraining it.

The young inventor was too dazed to move for a few minutes.

Even had he got upon his feet he could not have run.

Observing this, Ivan Janova ran for the place the cry came from, and saw that it was at a spot where the rocks were but a few feet above a deep pool in the bay.

Jack had left his little boy playing there when he went to Ivan's rescue, and the child had accidentally fallen into the water.

He was a beautiful boy seven years of age, with light curly hair, big blue eyes, and a rich, healthy complexion, his little body clad in a sailor suit, and a blue straw sailor hat on his head.

The child was drowning as he could not swim.

No sooner did Ivan realize this, when he boldly dove off the rocks into the water and seized Jack Wright, Jr.

It was an easy matter for the young Russian to hold up the little child, and he swam for the flat shore further away.

Jack had revived, and limped to the rock from whence the child had fallen, when he saw Ivan holding up the youngster with one hand, and swimming with the other.

"Fallen in!" the inventor muttered, an anxious look upon his face. "By thunder, if it hadn't been for the young Russian my boy would have perished. I'm grateful to Ivan Janova."

Then he shouted encouragingly in Russian:

"Brave lad! Keep up! Can you reach the shore with him?"

"Oh, yes. I'm a good swimmer, sir," replied Ivan, cheerfully.

"How is the boy, hurt?"

"No, only drenched and frightened."

"Thank God, it is no worse."

A few moments afterward Ivan reached the shore with his burden, and Jack took the little boy in his arms, kissed and consoled him and finally quieted him.

The young Russian wrung the water from his clothes.

"To save my life you nearly lost your child," he remarked.

"You have repaid what I did by rescuing him," Jack replied.

"We are even then," laughed Ivan.

"Yes, practically. You had better come home with me, and get your clothing dried. You are drenched to the skin."

"Very well. I admit that I feel very uncomfortable," answered the young Russian. "Do you live far from here?"

"In that big house, the garden of which slopes down to the creek. I mean the one where the big brick workshop stands at the foot of it on the bank of the stream."

"Ah, yes! A beautiful place. Is that your shop?"

"It is. Within its walls I build my inventions."

"Of what do they consist?"

"Flying machines, submarine boats, and electric engines."

"Indeed! Three strange kinds of inventions. Have you a company?"

"Oh, no. I employ workmen—mechanics of various kinds, and am usually assisted in my work by two old friends. One of them is a retired old marine with a glass eye and a wooden leg. His name is Tim Topstay. The other is a little fat Dutchman called Fritz Schneider. Both live at my house, and always travel with me in my inventions."

"I see. Have you perfected anything new lately?"

"Yes. A flying machine which I call the Electric Air Rocket."

"I am curious to see this peculiar machine."

"So you shall to-night or to-morrow."

"But I may not be here to-morrow, sir."

"Oh, yes, you will! You must stay here all night."

"Very well; just as you say, and I thank you for the invitation."

They soon reached Jack's house.

But they did not observe that Peter Darinka was watching them from among the trees, and did not hear the wretch mutter the most malignant threats against both of them.

Jack's wife met them.

She was a beautiful young woman.

Her consternation knew no bounds when she learned what had befallen her darling child, and she hastened away with him, weeping and covering his rosy little face with fond kisses.

Jack then assigned the Russian boy to a bedroom, gave him dry clothing, and when supper was announced he came down, looking none the worse for his ducking.

Tim and Fritz were at the table, and were introduced to the boy, and were told what had transpired on the rocks of Wrightstown bay.

"Ye kin keel haul me if that wuzn't a narrer escape fer both the kid an' this youngster," said Tim, who was a short, stocky man of middle age, with a sandy beard and a sun-burned face.

The old sailor was strongly addicted to lies and tobacco.

"I tink so neider," added Fritz, who was a dreadful fat young man, with yellow hair, bulging blue eyes, and a temper as uncertain as that of a crab. "Dot poy vos got spunk mit him, und I like me dot alretty, even if he vos a Roosh-un."

"For my part," added Jack, earnestly, "I feel under such a deep obligation to him that I'd like to benefit him some way."

"Ay, ay, I quite agrees wi' ye, Jack!"

"Vet, for him you could dit?" asked the Dutchman.

"I'll question him, and find out."

Jack was a good linguist, and translated what he wished to say.

When he finished, the young Russian smiled, and said.

"I'm sure I am as greatly indebted to you as you imagine you are to me. But there is nothing you could do, I am sure. It is my intention to return to St. Petersburg at once and lay claim to the fortune awaiting me there."

"Then I'll notify the police here of Peter Darinka's attack upon you," said Jack, "and have the villain put in prison so he cannot molest you again in future."

"A greater favor you could not bestow," replied the boy in serious tones, "for I am really afraid of that man."

"When we finish supper, then, you come with me, and I will lodge the complaint against the man."

According to this arrangement they left the house together an hour later and proceeded to the police station.

Darinka had been shadowing the house.

He saw them leave and stole after them.

As they turned into a dark side street he fired two pistol shots after them, and so well were they aimed that both Jack and Ivan fell prostrate in the street seriously injured.

CHAPTER II.

THE AIR-ROCKET.

THE pistol shots soon brought an alarmed crowd surging from all directions to the spot where Jack had fallen.

But when they got there, they found the young inventor lying alone upon the sidewalk just recovering his senses.

In answer to the anxious questions that poured from every mouth, Jack pulled his faculties together, staggered to his feet with a bleeding wound upon his head, and said:

"I've been shot."

"By whom?" asked a policeman.

"A Russian," said Jack, describing Darinka.

"I saw the whole affair," vouchsafed one of the men. "As soon as Mr. Wright fell the villain rushed up to them, and a cab rattled up to the curb. The man lifted the boy in, and sped away before any of us could reach this spot."

"Send out an alarm, he is trying to murder that boy," said Jack. "For my part I'll go home and have this wound doctored. It's only a cut on the scalp but it's painful."

The policeman hastened away to the police station, and Jack returned to his house and a physician was summoned.

He soon had the wound dressed and assured the inventor that he would be almost well in a few days.

The police made an effort to find Darinka and his young victim, but failed to locate them.

As soon as Jack was well enough to get about again he sent for a noted detective, for he was determined to find the Russian and the boy.

Two motives actuated him.

In the first place he wanted to have the villain punished for shooting him like an assassin, and in the second place he was determined not to let the Russian baffle him.

Jack's pity for Ivan was aroused.

He appreciated what the boy did to save little Jack Wright, Jr., and he also wished to baffle the evil design of the man.

When he was alone with the detective, Jack told him the whole story, and in conclusion said to the officer:

"I want you to track down Peter Darinka, even if you have to cross the ocean to do it. Never mind the expense. I am well off and am willing to stand it, only bring that wretch to the bar of justice, and try to save the boy's life."

The detective then departed.

He succeeded in tracing Darinka and his victim to New York.

From there he wrote Jack that the Russian had shanghaied Ivan Janova aboard a vessel bound for St. Petersburg, via the Baltic Sea, several days previously.

Jack telegraphed the officer to chase them and report from Russia, whereupon the detective left New York by a fast steamer.

Soon after his departure the young inventor resumed his work upon the flying machine of which he had spoken to Ivan.

Jack had gathered a large fortune from the use of his wonderful inventions, and was then very wealthy.

On the morning he went to the workshop with Tim and Fritz to resume his labor on the Air Rocket, he said to them.

"I believe I have discovered the means of making one of the most buoyant gases ever produced.

"Shimney Christmas," responded Fritz, delightedly. "Dot vos der only ting vot yer wanted ter found oud, so dot yer-could made dot flyin' machines go by der sky."

"Yes. I thought I'd have to harness a balloon to her, but I've found a better method. In fact, I've discovered a chemical compound which will produce the most marvelous gas ever heard of. It only requires a ridiculously small volume of it to raise a very heavy weight in the air. Any quantity of it can be made in a few seconds of time, so that if we use it in the Rocket she can rise or fall at our pleasure. You'll soon see how it works. All we need do now is to make three reservoirs and an automatic governor to control it."

"Ha' ye got yer plans ready?" asked Tim, blinking his good eye and taking a chew of navy plug.

"Yes, and here they are. Let's get to work and finish her."

It occupied several weeks to finish the parts Jack mentioned, but when the gas was tried, they found its lifting capacity to be extraordinary in comparison with its bulk.

It was non-expansive under difference of atmospheric pressure, and certainly was a most wonderful discovery.

When the Rocket was fitted with the reservoirs, retorts, pipes, and other mechanism for using the gas, she presented an odd appearance.

She was shaped somewhat like a canoe, one hundred feet

in length, her aluminum plates being strongly banded with steel straps.

Deriving her ascensional force from the gas, it was stowed away beneath her deck with the tank for manufacturing it, and the pipes for storing or exhausting it, to rise or descend in the air.

She was propelled by eight wheels, four on each side, telescopic flanges held her up from the ground, and at each end was a rudder.

A small railed platform stood in the center of the deck, while fore and aft of it were two depressions in which any one could sit or stand to steer the machine, if working on the outside.

Within the Rocket were better arrangements for the pilot.

The machine contained but three small rooms, the one forward being a pilot-house under deck, the other amidships was to be used as a cabin and state room, while aft was a small kitchen.

All the mechanism laid under the flooring.

The wheels each had their shafts joined to the shafts of small but powerful electric motors that revolved them.

A little dynamo operated by powerful springs gave its current to the motors to revolve the wheels, while some of the wires were made to light incandescent lamps in the rooms, heat the radiators and electric stove, and give current to a search-light.

Of all the electrical contrivances Jack Wright had ever invented before, the Rocket was most extraordinary.

She combined extreme lightness with vast strength to resist hard blows, her machinery was small, of little weight, and very powerful, and the pilot could control all her movements.

"She ought to beat everything ever produced before," said Jack to his two friends, when she was finished. "According to my figures she ought to breast the strongest gale that ever blew. In a calm I have calculated that her propellers will carry her along faster than a mile and one half per minute. Besides this, if she were to fall in the water, she would float like a cork in the roughest sea, and if a volley of rifle balls were to strike her, fired at a distance of ten yards away they would not leave a dent in her plates."

"Gee whiz!" Tim exclaimed, "yer've got her down rather fine."

"Every fraction of an inch has been carefully calculated. The machinery in her hold and the peculiar arrangement of her side wheels make it almost impossible to tip her over."

"Donnerwetter! I vas itchin' to try her vunct!" said Fritz.

"We shall this evening," replied Jack. "I am anxious to test her search-light. It's an entirely new arrangement of the reflecting and concentrating prisms. It ought to throw a clear light from the gun-shaped barrel to a distance of five miles so that small objects can be seen on a dark night with a telescope."

"Waal, an' now as yer've got her done, wot are yer goin' ter do with her?" asked Tim, curiously.

"Make a voyage to Siberia," replied Jack, promptly. "You know I am a large stockholder in the fishing business carried on in Wrightstown? Well, the company has received word that one of our vessels was seized in the Gulf of Obi by the authorities of Siberia, and while the vessel and its cargo were confiscated the crew were made prisoners and sent to work in the mines."

"How yer hear about dot?" asked Fritz, in surprise.

"From one of the crew who escaped and came back with the news," answered the inventor. "We sought redress, but failed to get it. I resolved to take the law into my own hands, and determined to go there, try to release my men, regain the valuable ship and cargo. I presume you will both go with me?"

"Of course we will, my lad."

"Ach, yer don't need ter ask us alretty."

"An' wot's more," added Tim, "we'll save ther ship an' crew too. I recollect when I wuz in ther navy, aboard o'

ther ole frigate Wabash, we wuz blowed ashore on ther coast o' Japan, an' ther Mikado came down an' took us all prisoners. Seein' as we wuz bound ter git our figger heads chopped off, wot did I do?"

"Mein Gott!" groaned Fritz, "he vos goin' to vork off a yarn!"

"Wot did I do, I axes you?" roared Tim. "Waal, I'll tell yer. I sprung on ther Mikako, an' bitin' a hole in his ear, I told ther hull army if they didn't run away I'll chaw out his r'yal jiblets. They wuz askeered I'll kill ther lord-high-cockalorum, so away they ruuned, yelling fer me ter spare him——"

"How long since you've learned to talk Japanese," laughed Jack.

"I didn't use thar lingo," loftily answered Tim. "I spoke English, an' these pertickler lubbers understood it. Waal, sir, as soon as they wuz gone we returned aboard, an' sailin' a leetle ways from shore, we rammed ther graud whang-doodle into a gun an' shot him ashore. Ther minute he landed yer'd oughter hear him swear! Oh, gee! He shooked his fist at me, an' ses he——"

"You said your ship was blown ashore, so how did you happen to sail away so easily?" demanded Jack severely.

"Why," grinned Tim, "ther tide riz an' floated us."

"Then explain why the Mikado wasn't blown to pieces when you shot him out of a gun?"

Tim colored up and scratched his ear, for he was stuck.

The more he pondered over the matter, the more he realized that he, like all liars, had given himself away at last.

Fritz chuckled over his evident embarrassment.

The Dutchman then picked up an acient accordeon, and beginning to play a funeral march, he remarked:

"Say, Din, vhy yer don'd answer vunct?"

The music of the accordeon always exasperated the old sailor, and as Tim loved to tease him, he never lost a chance to play these dirges so the old salt could hear them.

"Stow that grindin', will yer?" angrily retorted Tim, who now realized that he could evade Jack's trying question by pitching into the fat fellow.

"Ach, yer don'd could got oud ohf it dot vay," jeered Fritz, derisively. "Shack vos caughted yer py a bick lie. Yust shpoken vot you ougher answer him alretty vunct."

"I'll foul yer weather tackle if yer don't belay thar."

"Yer don't vos bick enough dot you do dem dings!"

"Wot, I can't? I'll show yer!"

And Tim spit on his hands, made fists, and stumped toward the mischievous Dutchman with a dangerous gleam in his good eye.

Up jumped Fritz from a stool he sat on, before the sailor could reach him, and the old sailor stumbled over it, landed on his stomach and slid across the floor.

Away galloped the Dutchman, out of the shop, and up scrambled Tim and away he went stumping after him.

A loud chorus of yells now rose from a monkey and parrot in cages that hung from the wall adding to the general uproar.

The bird was named Bismarck, and Fritz owned him, while the beast was called Whiskers by Tim, who claimed him.

Both pets had been captured by their respective owners in Africa some years previously, when they made their first voyage with Jack.

Left alone in the shop, Jack burst out into a hearty laugh over the funny antics of his friends.

He finished his work on the Air Rocket.

Then he entered the house.

As Jack sat down to the table a servant brought in his mail, and the first letter he espied brought an exclamation from his lips.

"Wot's gone amiss now, my lad?" asked Tim, who had settled his difference with Fritz before they came in.

"A letter from St. Petersburg," answered the inventor.

"Vot!" cried Fritz. "From dot dededives?"

"Yes; he was not to write me until he had important news."

"Let's hear wot he's done," suggested Tim.

Jack opened the letter and glanced in amazement at its contents.

CHAPTER III.

FALLING FROM THE SKY.

Jack's companions were wild with curiosity to hear what the detective had written from Russia about Ivan Janova.

The young inventor finished perusing the letter, and a frown gathered darkly upon his brow as he glanced up at his friends and said:

"By heavens, this is the worst piece of rascality I ever heard of."

"Vos iss?" demanded Fritz.

"Fer ther Lord's sake read ther letter!" Tim exclaimed.

"Very well. You can then understand the case better," replied Jack.

He then read the following note:

"St. PETERSBURG, October 21st, 18—."

"MR. JACK WRIGHT: I arrived here one day after the vessel in which Peter Darinka shanghaied Ivan Janova, and at once began to hunt for the boy and the man. I learned that the boy had stolen away from the ship, as it was the captain's intention to keep him aboard. Darinka followed him. I got on their track in the city, and discovered that Darinka was a Nihilist.

"A series of events then happened which led to the arrest of the boy. He was confined in prison. Through the efforts of the American Consul, I gained admission to Ivan Janova's cell. He then explained the adventures that happened to him. To go back to the beginning, he said that when he recovered his senses after you and he were shot by Darinka, he found himself in the carriage with the villain. They were speeding across the country. In due time they arrived near New York, when Darinka drugged him. He had a bad wound in his skull, but the man had plastered it up. When he finally recovered his senses, he was aboard of a ship at sea. There he was treated very badly. Reaching this city he made his escape ashore. In the night a rough-appearing man accosted him, and offered, in a kind-hearted manner, to give him shelter. He gladly accepted, as he was destitute. The man brought him to the garret of a dilapidated old house, and left him there, saying he must not say a word to any one who entered. He then left the boy. Ivan laid on the floor and fell asleep. He was awakened by the entrance of a dozen masked men with a lantern. Before they could question the boy, the secret police raided the den. The masked men were Nihilists. They were the worst of the lot in the empire.

"Ivan was arrested with them. It then occurred to him that the man who lured him there was his cousin, Peter Darinka, cleverly disguised. This belief gained a foundation; in fact, at the trial Darinka appeared as a witness against them. He swore that Ivan was one of the conspirators, and when he gave evidence against the others, they declared that Darinka was their ringleader, and declared that Ivan was innocent. They said Darinka had only betrayed them to put the boy out of his way with them. Of course, a deaf ear was turned to what the Nihilists said. All were promptly convicted, Ivan with them. They were sentenced to life imprisonment in exile in the Siberian mines at Yakutsk. It was heart-rending to see Ivan protest his innocence, and see with what discredit it was received: I exerted every possible means of saving the boy, and for my pains have been ordered out of the country on pain of imprisonment if I remain. I found that Darinka was a secret policeman in the employ of the Government.

"It was then useless for me to proceed against him, for while I had no sympathy he had the confidence of even the Czar. The dirty trick he played of organizing a gang of Nihilists and then betraying them into the hands of the an-

thorities is looked upon here as a very clever deed. It has popularized Darinka. He will now lose no time in having Ivan legally murdered in the Siberian mines. Then he will get possession of the poor boy's inheritance. If ever a lad deserved the unmeasured sympathy of all just minded people, that person is Ivan Janova. As there remains nothing more for me to do here I shall return by the first steamer, and, I regret to say, bailed. Yours, truly,

"OSCAR SLICK, detective."

In this letter Jack's companions saw a determination on the part of Peter Darinka to accomplish his purpose at any risk.

The villain had put the boy out of his way.

His next step would evidently be to kill Ivan entirely.

"Well, boys," said Jack, after a slight pause, "what do you think of this—isn't it abominable?"

"A blamed sight wuss nor that!" growled Tim.

"I vish me dot Darinka could been beat by dot game!" cried Fritz.

"Perhaps he can," asserted Jack, quietly.

"How?" eagerly asked Tim.

"Ain't we going to Siberia in the Rocket?"

"Fer sure!" cried Fritz. "I unterfershtood dot. Yer vos mean dot ve shtop by der vay und bick up dot poy?"

"That's the plan, exactly."

"Hurroar!" said Tim, banging the table with his fist. "I'm wi' ye."

"Then that point is settled. We will have a man with us who is familiar with the country, too."

"Who dot vos?"

"The sailor whom I told you had come back to tell us that the Russians had stolen one of our ships."

"Wot's his name, my lad?"

"Charles Woods. He is a plucky young fellow, understands the Russians and their language, and will be a valuable man for our expedition."

"Vhen ve will shtart off?" asked Fritz.

"In two days. We must provision the Rocket to-morrow, and get such necessary supplies aboard as we will require."

That settled the matter.

Jack sent out his orders.

On the following morning his purchases began to arrive. As fast as they came in they were stowed aboard the Rocket.

Toward nightfall Jack said to his friends:

"We haven't given the machine a trial yet. I propose that we take a short flight after supper to test her."

Tim and Fritz agreed to this.

Accordingly they went to the shop and opened the movable roof.

Jack then procured some of the gas-making chemicals, and dropping the compound into the generator, he poured in some water, and turning several of the brass cocks, he fastened his glance on the meter.

It soon showed him the development of a large volume of gas, and the Rocket began to tug at her moorings, as if impatient to soar up into the sky.

He then passed into the pilot house.

Here there were various kinds of ballooning instruments for telling the temperature, wind velocity, dew-points, and attitude, a wheel for steering a compass, and a board on which were the electric controlling levers, switches, gas-controlling cocks and electrical registers.

"Are you ready, boys?" shouted Jack.

"Ready, lad," responded Tim from the deck.

"Cast off the moorings."

"Yah," replied Fritz.

In a few moments the lines were unfastened.

Jack then turned one of the cocks, and a large volume of gas was quickly generated in the reservoirs.

Instantly the Air Rocket rose from the ground, the telescopic flanges came in, and the machine passed through the roof.

Up, up she rose in the night sky like a bird.

Jack had gauged the generator to make enough gas to carry the machine to a height of one hundred and fifty feet, and she paused at that altitude, showing that his calculations were correct.

He then turned one of the switches, and pulling a lever that started the dynamo, the electric current was thrown into the motors, and the big driving wheels spun around.

Ahead darted the machine at the rate of fifty miles an hour.

The motors were five speed machines, Jack being capable of adjusting them from a very slow to a very high rate of velocity.

They were also reversible, so that the Rocket could be backed if it became necessary.

The incandescent lamps could be lighted by turning them on the same as a gas light was worked; there were fan motors in the rooms that worked by switches, and the searchlight could slide in and out of a deadlight hole in the bow.

"So far, she works exactly as I calculated," said Jack in tones of satisfaction, as he steered the machine over the bay.

A loud whirring sound came from the propellers, and a draught of tremendous power blew away from each side of the Rocket.

In a few moments they were hovering over the bay, and Jack stopped the machine and listened to a whistling sound that reached his ears.

To his surprise he saw the Rocket falling.

"Something wrong, boys!" he sang out.

These words had scarcely left Jack's lips when there sounded a loud explosion that shook the machine frightfully.

A big hole was blown through her deck.

Out gushed a cloud of gas.

And down dropped the Rocket.

A thrill of horror passed over her crew.

Falling with awful velocity they struck the water.

The fall had almost taken away their breath, it was so fast.

Crash! splash! they went into the bay with awful force, and a mass of foamy water flew high in the air around them.

The Rocket went down until she was entirely submerged, the fore and aft depressions filled, and the brine spurted into the living rooms, making her occupants think they would be drowned.

For an instant she remained buried.

Every one was flung down by the shock.

Then the Rocket began to ascend again.

Out of the water she bounded, and floated on the surface as buoyantly as a ship at sea.

A torrent had gushed through the hole in the deck flooding the gas reservoir, and large quantities of the brine went down into the hold, almost covering the flat lying machinery.

Jack had not been seriously hurt.

He struggled to his feet, soaking wet, and rushed back into the cabin, where he found Tim floundering on the floor kicking and sputtering, and trying to swim in about six inches of water.

"Injured?" gasped Jack.

"Reckon every bone in my hulk is shattered!"

"Get up! You can't swim there!"

"Wot's happened?"

"One of the gas reservoirs exploded."

"Gee whiz! I thought as a bomb shell hit us," said Tim rising.

"Where's Fritz?"

"He wuz in ther kitching."

"Go out, and see if we'll float," said Jack, stopping the machinery.

As Tim complied, Jack rushed into the next room.

There he found Fritz lying senseless on the floor.

He had bumped his head against the stove and had a lump on his forehead as big as his fist.

While Jack was examining him, Tim entered, and said cheerfully.

"She's floatin' like a duck!"

"What's the extent of the damage?" asked the inventor.

"The midship reservoir blowed out a deck plate."

"Nothing else?"

"No, not a thing."

"We are in luck to escape so lightly."

They revived Fritz and then made an examination.

The damage proved to be no worse than Tim said, and Jack saw that he could easily repair it, and he said:

"It is evident that the reservoir leaked, as I heard the gas whistling out of it. That weakened it, and made it burst. To-morrow we must put in new reservoirs, stronger than these."

He then passed into the pilot room.

Peering out through the bull's-eyes that had been opened in the bow he caught view of a row-boat across the bay in which sat a man rowing with might and main.

He was pursued by another man in a skiff, attired in sailor's costume, and, seeing the seaman gaining, he pulled a pistol from his pocket and began to blaze away at him.

"Jingo!" exclaimed Jack. "See there!"

"Dere will been a murder dere soon," said Fritz.

"Not if I can prevent it. I'm going to investigate that row."

And so saying, Jack started the air propellers, and they drove the Rocket through the water swiftly.

Jack steered her toward the skiffs, wondering what was the cause of the flight.

CHAPTTR IV.

THE HERMIT'S GOLD.

WITHIN a few minutes the electric Air Rocket arrived close to the two boats, and an exclamation of surprise escaped Jack.

"I know that sailor!" he exclaimed. "He is Charley Woods, the man who is to go with us to Siberia in the air-ship."

"Ach, you don't shpoken!" said Fritz. "Who dot odder vun vos?"

"Perhaps I may find out by inquiring."

The fellow who had been firing had fled when he saw the Rocket rushing toward him.

Jack now shouted to the beardless young sailor:

"What's the row, Woods?"

"Catch that fellow, Mr. Wright—quick!" responded the sailor, in hurried tones. "He'll get away if you don't."

There was no time for explanations, for the fugitive was then very near the shore, and Jack sent the Rocket after him.

He increased her speed, and she swiftly bore down on the boat.

"Stand by to arrest him, boys!" cried the inventor.

Tim and Fritz armed themselves and hurried up to the platform.

Just as they emerged, the Rocket reached the cliff.

"Haul to, there!" shouted Jack.

"Go to blazes!" responded the man.

"I'll run you down if you don't!"

"Run me, and be hanged to you!"

Straight at the skiff shot the flying machine.

Crash—bang! went the prow against the little boat.

It smashed in the side of the skiff just as its occupant was going to shoot at Tim and the Dutchman.

Over went the boat.

And the man sunk in the water.

Within a moment he rose; puffing and panting and striking out, he swam for the near by shore.

He had dropped his pistol to keep himself afloat, and swam like a fish to get away.

"Come about!" roared Tim, aiming his pistol at the man, "if yer don't run up in ther wind, I'll shoot yer!"

The fugitive glanced over his shoulder, and seeing the sailor and Fritz both aiming at him, he began to weaken.

"Hold on! Don't fire!" he yelled.

"Then haul to on your life!"

"Yes! Yes! I'll stop!"

And stop he did.

When the Rocket reached him Fritz shouted:

"Glimb apoard!"

"All right!" growled the man. "Only don't fire."

He caught hold of the hull, and crawled up the bow.

The sailor and Dutchman still kept him covered.

The man had a sullen look on his hang-dog face, and as he climbed down into the forward aperture, he growled:

"What are you stopping me for?"

"So dot ve see vot Charley Woods vant mit yer."

"Raise yer flippers!" said Tim.

The man lifted his hands over his head.

Up to the Rocket came the sailor in the skiff, and fastening it to the flying machine, he came aboard.

"So you didn't get away after all?" said he to the prisoner.

"You didn't catch me anyhow," growled the man.

"That makes but little difference to me so long as you are caught."

Just then the Rocket paused, and Jack came out with a piece of marline in his hand, with which he bound the man.

This done, he turned to Woods and asked him:

"What has this fellow done?"

"Robbed me," replied the sailor.

"Of what—money?"

"No, sir—a valuable paper."

"Take it away from him!"

Woods searched the prisoner's pockets.

Presently he drew out a folded sheet of old soiled paper tied with a string.

"Thank the Lord I've got it back," said the sailor with a great sigh of intense relief. "I thought it was as good as lost!"

"How came he to steal it from you?"

"I'll tell you, Mr. Wright. You know I live at the Sea Spider House, over there near the bay shore. Well, sir, to-night I got about three sheets in the wind, when this chap came in. We got talking about money matters, and I began to blow about a great treasure which I discovered in Siberia and took out this old paper to show it to him. Then what should the villain do but snatch it away from me and run. I chased him of course, for it sobered me up to see my only means of finding the treasure disappearing. We both reached the bay. He got in a boat and I in another. Then I went after him, and he began to shoot. The funniest part of it is that not one of his bullets hit me."

"Yes, that was a very funny part," ironically said Jack.

"Do you know who the skunk is?"

"No, for he looks like a stranger in Wrightstown."

"What shall I do with him?"

"Hand him over to the police, of course."

"That wouldn't do."

"Why not?"

"If I did, I'd have to produce my paper in court to prove how valuable it is. Then other people would learn its contents."

"What of it?"

"They'd learn where the treasure is located, and some one might go to Siberia ahead of me and steal it. Such a game would pay any one, for the treasure is worth thousands of dollars. I suppose this villain's plan was to forestall me at getting it."

"What treasure is it?"

"I'll tell you all about it, sir, when we are alone."

"Very well. And as you've got the paper back, and fear an exposure of your secret if you prosecute this thief, the best thing you can do is to let him go."

"Just my idea, sir, although I hate to let him go unpunished."

"It can't be helped."

"Can't I give him a thrashing first, just so he'll remember me?"

"It would have no salutary effect. All you could gain by such a course would be a vent for your spite against him."

"Then we'll release the villain, sir."

"All right; I'll cut his bonds."

And Jack severed the marline.

The man stood irresolute.

He could hardly credit his good luck.

"Am I free?" he asked.

"Yes; jump overboard and swim ashore," said Jack.

"Thank you," said the man, and he plunged into the bay and made a bee line for the shore.

When he was gone Jack said to Woods:

"You are going up with us in the Rocket, ain't you?"

"Of course," replied the sailor. "My principal object was to show you this paper, and if you would go after the gold with me, I'd divide all we managed to carry away."

"Let me hear about it now."

"Very well, sir. I may as well. You know how I escaped from the authorities in Siberia? And I told you how I was lost in the wilderness. But I did not tell you by what means I escaped. To be as brief as possible, I stumbled across an old hut on the mountain side and found an old hermit lying there dying of some fatal disease.

"I did all I could for him, but he expired. I searched the premises and discovered this paper. It is covered with a map, diagrams, and explanations which he had made. The language was Russian. As soon as I examined it, I knew my exact location, and I learned that the hut was built over the shaft of a gold mine which the hermit had discovered.

"I opened a hidden trap door in the floor and went down into the mine. For many years the hermit had been burrowing in the ground after the vein of precious metal. He was unknown and unseen. He had excavated a cave. In it were stacks of golden bars. He had melted the metal from the ore and molded it into these bars. In this manner he had accumulated a large fortune. I took a piece of the gold and carefully concealing the entrance to the shaft, left the place.

"I was on dangerous ground. The authorities from whom I fled were hunting for me. I resolved to get away. Some day, when I was forgotten, I could return and cart the golden treasure away. The map guided me admirably. Reaching a city I sold the gold. With plenty of money, it was an easy matter to get back here."

"Remarkable!" said Jack.

"As we are going after my shipmate," said Charley, "it will not take us far out of our way to go to the old hermit's hut."

"We shall do so," said Jack, with a nod. "And if the gold is yet there, we will get it out of Siberia, and sell it."

"That's the talk!" cried Charley. "You'll find out what a big fortune there is of that stuff when you see it."

The Rocket ran to the creek.

Up the stream she went to the shop.

There she was hoisted and hoisted out of the basin in the shop to undergo repairs on the following day.

"It's lucky we gave her a trial trip," said Jack. "If that reservoir had burst when we were higher in the air, or hovering over land, our doom would have been sealed."

"Nuthin' but ther slow escape o' some o' ther gas afore ther explosion is wot saved our necks anyway," said Tim. "It let us down nigh ther bay afore we fell fer good."

"You had better be careful that fellow don't return and get the paper away from you again, Woods!" said Jack.

"Oh, he won't do that, sir," replied the sailor, "for I'm going to leave it with you for safe keeping. You can then study it over at your leisure, and see what you think of it. I'll be on hand with my kit of clothes to-morrow noon."

"Don't forget your furs. We are all provided with suits."

"All right, sir. Good-night."

And he went away, while Jack and his friends entered the house.

On the following morning a telegram reached Jack from the detective, stating that he had embarked for New York.

Work was begun upon the flying machine, and by noon-time she had new gas reservoirs and new plates put in.

She was then much stronger than she had been before.

The Rocket was laden with a large supply of water and provisions and arms, ammunition, and everything needful.

But the sailor did not materialize.

It surprised our friends a trifle, and Fritz went out to find him.

The Dutchman saw a crowd in the street surrounding Charley, a policeman and the villain who had tried to rob the sailor.

With supreme audacity the rascal had sworn in court to a complaint, charging Charley with having robbed him of the paper.

The officer was trying to arrest the sailor upon that charge despite his assertions of innocence, when Fritz appeared.

Seeing that the sailor's arrest would delay the trip, Fritz resolved to make a bold move to avoid such a misfortune.

He therefore dashed through the crowd, scattering them right and left, and, reaching Charley, he roared, excitedly:

"Run fer der shop!"

Then Fritz gave the audacious thief a punch that knocked him over, dove between the policeman's legs, rose and upset him, and as Charley sped away, the Dutchman dashed after him.

Up jumped the cop boiling with rage and gave pursuit.

The thief followed, and after them came the whole crowd, yelling like a horde of Indians.

Away rushed the sailor and the Dutchman.

A most exciting chase followed, and as neither Fritz nor Charley were very swift runners, they began to lose ground.

The fugitives headed for Jack's grounds.

"Faster! Faster!" panted Fritz.

"I'm doing my level best," replied Charley.

"Dey vos gainin' fast!"

"I'm afraid we can't get away."

"Ve——" began the Dutchman.

But Fritz tripped and fell to the ground.

CHAPTER V.

SHORT CIRCUITING A CURRENT.

UP to the unlucky Dutchman rushed the crowd, but ere any of them could lay a hand upon him, Charley drew a pistol from his hip pocket, and menacing them with it, he shouted:

"Back with you! I'll fire at the first man who touches him!"

The thief and the policeman came to a sudden halt.

Panic stricken at sight of the revolver, the crowd scattered.

That gave Fritz time to get upon his feet again, and Charley cried:

"Run! It's only a little further!"

"You vos a drump, Sharley!" panted Fritz, gratefully.

And away they dashed again, followed by the angry officer.

Getting into Jack's yard, they headed for the shop, dashed in and slammed the door shut in the policeman's face.

In a moment more they were aboard.

"What's up?" called Jack from the platform.

"Cop chasing us," Charley replied.

"Here he comes in now."

"Up mit yer!" roared Fritz.

The Dutchman sent a bucket of water flying all over the officer, and up flew the air-ship under Tim's guidance.

Fritz ensconced himself in the stern depression and Charley in the forward one, while Tim was invisible in the steering room.

The stars and stripes were floating from a short flag mast.

It was broad daylight.

As the Rocket went up through the roof of the shop, Jack grasped the flag staff with one hand and with the other he waved his hat to the shouting crowd of people down in the street.

Up, up the flying machine continued to mount, and in a few minutes she reached an elevation of one thousand feet when a cloud bank was encountered and she plunged into it.

There she vanished from the view of the people in Wrightstown, and came to a pause in her ascent.

Bismarck and Whiskers were aboard in their cages, for they always were taken by their masters on the trips they made.

Jack then asked Fritz why they were chased and learned the facts.

The machine was then steered in a north-easterly direction, and shot out of the mist over the Atlantic Ocean.

Jack remained upon the platform until the band disappeared astern, and then went down into the little pilot house.

"She's all right now, Tim," he remarked, cheerfully, as he glanced at the gas pressure meter. "The new reservoirs couldn't burst if there was fifty times as much pressure brought to bear upon them."

"Waal, my lad, she's ther stiddest ridin' machine wot I ever seen," replied the old sailor, as he bit off a piece of plug tobacco and stowed it away in his cheek. "Ther wind's blowin' agin us from ther nor'east'ard twenty knots a hour, but ye kin blast my timbers if ther log don't show a speed o' fifty knots wi' ther two speed motor currents on. Ther Rocket's wot I calls a honey-cooler!"

"Mild up there, Bolivar!" bawled a voice in Tim's ear.

"Wot's that?" roared the old salt, turning around.

"Take a drop on yourself," replied the voice.

"Holy smoke, it's ther parrot," grinned Tim.

"You bet," chuckled the bird. "Say, come out and have a fit with me!"

"I'll pull yer nose out o' j'int if yer don't stow yer jawin' tackle!"

"Hurrah for me!" yelled the bird. "Pretty Poll! Cheese it, fellers, I've got the mumps! Cracker! Wow—ha, ha, ha! Quawk! Ur-r-r!"

"That 'ere chicken," remarked Tim, in tones of contempt, "ain't level in ther nut. Don't yer notice as he can't keep up no reasonable talk fer two minutes at a stretch? He's looney. Has ter switch off inter a lot o' rubbish without no head or tail to it, an'—oh—ouch! Good Lord! Who jabbed me with a pin?"

He turned around and saw the monkey reaching out through the bars of his cage, pulling a single hair in Tim's whiskers.

The mischievous little rascal let go as soon as he was detected, settled back demurely in his cage, and then scratching his ear he suddenly let out a diabolical chatter.

Jack roared with laughter and relieved Tim of the wheel.

"Your monkey is the culprit, Tim!" he exclaimed.

"Blast his buttons!" said the sailor, shaking his fist at the animal, "if he wuzn't littler'n me I'd keelhaul him!"

He thereupon left the pilot-house, followed by a shower of nuts, which the monkey hurled with great precision.

When he reached the cabin he saw Charley looking slightly startled.

"Hello thar! be yer sea-sick?" grinned Tim.

"No," replied the sailor faintly, "but this height makes me dizzy."

"Yer a great sailor, I must say, ter feel that way."

"I never went aloft on a mast as high as we are."

"Werry true. But I've been higher'n this in my day."

"Have you? Well, I wouldn't care to venture it."

"Air yer gittin' chicken-hearted?"

"No; but I ain't accustomed to it yet."

"Come up on ther platform, an' I'll git yer used to it."

The sailor readily complied, for he felt pretty nervous.

When they stood on the platform he asked:

"What do you want me to do, Tim?"

"Jist cast yer gaze around ther horizon awhile."

Charley followed this advice, and too his surprise soon found that he quickly recovered from his illness.

Finally he turned to Tim, and said in more cheerful tones:

"I'm all O. K. now."

"Thar! Didn't I tell yer?" triumphantly asked Tim.

"I don't see how you could stand it higher up than this."

"Oh, 'tain't nuthin' when yer gits used to it."

"So I presume. How did you chance to fly so high?"

"Why, yer see, it wuz durin' ther war," said Tim. "I wuz in a captive balloon in the battle o' Bull Run watchin' ther enemy with a spy glass when along came a ball, it cut the rope, an' up I flew."

"Wasn't you scared?"

"Wot! Me scared?" haughtily asked Tim. "I reckon yer don't know who an' wot I am, messmate! No. I wuz delighted. I shot up a mile a minute, an' in half an hour or so, I wuz up pretty nigh onter seven miles in the air——"

"According to your calculation you ought to have been thirty miles up."

"Waal, I didn't stop ter reckon. I came pretty nigh ther right figger. Anyway, thar I wuz, an' I near got drownded."

"How could that be?"

"Yer know the rain?"

"Of course."

"Waal, I diskivered as it came from a big ocean wot floats in ther sky. Ther balloon dove up inter ther water, an' if I hadn't a jumped out, whar would I a been? Drownded, sir!"

"Oh, say, Tim, you're stretching it!"

"No I ain't!"

"How could an ocean float? What held it up?"

"I dunno, unless it wuz ther wind underneath."

"Well, you're a corker!"

"Don't interrup' me wi' foolish questions. Whar wuz I?"

"You said you jumped out of the balloon, seven miles in the air."

"Ay, now, so I did. Then wot happened? Yer see when I saw that water above, I opened my umbrelly. As I sailed down through ther sky, that ere ole gingham acted like a parachute. Away I settled arth'ard, an' afore I knowed it wot happened?"

"I give up the conundrum."

"Yer may not b'lieve it, sir, but I landed fa'r an' squar', right in ther middle o' a gang o' my messmates on ther deck o' ther ole frigate Wabash, from which I'd gone up in ther balloon, an'——"

"You said you was on the battle field of Bull Run!"

"Did I? Waal, I meant ter say aboard o' ther frigate."

"I think you are stuffing me, Tim."

"D'yer cast any reflections on my truthfulness?"

"I wouldn't be so impolite—I'd rather tell the truth, and call you a liar."

Tim's good eye snapped fire, and he grabbed Charley by the neck.

"Say that again!" he roared, fiercely.

"You're a liar!" calmly replied the young sailor.

"Say that again!" shouted Tim, savagely.

"Certainly. Anything to oblige. You're a liar!"

"D'yer know wot I do with lubbers wot calls me that?"

"No, sir. And what's more, I don't care! See?"

"I chaws 'em up!" said Tim, ferociously.

"You'd have to have razor-edged teeth to get away with me, Tim. I'm considered a pretty tough subject."

The old sailor saw that Charley did not flinch an inch, and he gradually grew less dangerous in appearance, and said, solemnly:

"Out o' pity fer yer wife an' fambly, I'll spare yer."

"Haven't got any," asserted Charley, coolly.

"Mebbe yer've got a poor ole mother——"

"Not a relation."

"Then as I pities yer forlorn, lonely sitiuation in this world, I'll fergive yer this time. But don't yer never say that again."

"Your generosity, Tim, is something extraordinary."

"Oh, don't mention it, lad. I've got a kind heart."

"Thank you very much for sparing me," said Charley, hardly able to repress a smile. "I'll do as much for you some day."

Fritz had been an interested spectator from the kitchen.

He had his accordeon on board, and closing the door and bolting it, he took the instrument out of a box and began a tune.

Tim heard it, and commenced to swear.

"I've got ter kill somebody," he asserted, "so I reckon I'll tackle ther Dutchman. Watch me wipe up ther kitching with him."

He went down to the kitchen door and tried to open it, but it failed to yield him admittance.

Then he pounded and kicked, and roared at Fritz to let him in, but the fat fellow ignored him and played away.

Charley laughed till the tears ran from his eyes.

"Go for him, Tim!" he chuckled.

"Blame it, he's locked me out!"

"I'm watching to see you wipe up the kitchen with him."

"Gee whiz! Will ye open that 'ere door?"

And bang—bang—bang! went another shower of blows against the panels, and Fritz howled mockingly:

"Coom in!"

Tim gave it up in despair, finally, and hastened back to the pilot-house, where he endeavored to drown out the sound by slamming the door shut.

Not until then did Fritz stop playing.

The young Dutchman then began to oil the machinery.

As it laid in a very narrow space under the floor, he had to creep along on his hands and knees.

The space was lighted by a few electric lamps.

Even the rooms above had such low ceilings that there was only just room to stand upright.

It was a rather complicated machine.

The wheels were buzzing, shafts were whirling and throbbing, armatures were turning so fast as to create a draught, and here and there flashing sparks were seen snapping where the copper and carbon brushes pressed against the commutators.

Fritz was a thorough electrician.

He understood everything about the machine, but like a good many other people, Fritz was somewhat careless.

Finding the dynamo oil cups in need of refilling, Fritz seized the machine with one hand, to raise himself up to them.

There is no danger in touching some generators with one hand, and that was why Fritz did so.

But at that moment the Rocket's speed was suddenly checked and it flung the Dutchman forward.

To save himself from going down flat on the floor, he thoughtlessly grasped the lead wire from the dynamo with his other hand at a point where there was no insulation.

That made a short circuit through his body.

He received the current through his system.

There were 300 volts on, and it wrung a wild yell from him.

His body stiffened out rigidly, his eyeballs bulged from their sockets and his hair rose on end.

It was impossible to let go.

And if he held on it would kill him.

CHAPTER VI.

SUPPRESSING A MUTINY.

Jack had been watching a ship down on the sea when Tim entered the wheel room and observed that there was trouble going on aboard.

It was a full rigged ship, and was drifting at the mercy of the wind and waves, her sails flapping idly on the yards.

Many of the crew were in the rigging. A barricade had been formed of boxes, barrels, rope and other things across the deck, and from the cabin windows pistol shots were blazing out.

Jack glanced around at Tim, and seeing who it was, he asked excitedly:

"Do you see that, Tim?"

"Ay, now! Wot d'yer make of it, lad?"

"Evidently a mutiny."

"Looks as if ther officers wuz in ther cabin."

"Yes; the crew are firing at them now."

From behind the barricade and from the rigging a deadly fusillade of shots was poured down at the cabin door and windows.

Jack could hear the crew yelling furiously, and recognized them as Danes, Norwegians and Swedes by the words they uttered.

Moreover, it was evident by their actions that many were drunk.

"Keel haul me if they ain't a desperate gang!" muttered Tim.

"I'm going down to aid the officers of that ship!"

"If yer don't, them lubbers will soon own her."

"Yes, and there will be murder for them to answer for."

"Heave ahead then, my lad."

"Call Charley and Fritz and you all arm yourselves."

Tim saluted, and returned to the after part of the Rocket just as Jack turned a brass cock and let off some of the gas.

The machine began to slowly settle down.

Just then the mutineers caught sight of her and realizing at once that she must be an enemy, one of them loaded the signal gun with a shot and aimed it at the Rocket.

Fortunately the inventor witnessed this act.

He knew that such a heavy shot might injure the Rocket, and instantly formed a plan of action.

He kept his glance on the gunner.

At this moment there sounded the yell of agony from Fritz and the inventor realized that some misfortune had befallen him.

Before he had time to ascertain what it was, the gunner fired.

Like lightning Jack saw the ball rising ahead.

If the Rocket kept on, it was bound to strike her.

He stopped the dynamo, and spun the wheel, the big rudders turned to starboard, and the machine curved around.

Jack had acted so promptly that he saved the Rocket.

The shot barely grazed her port side.

Had she not turned so suddenly, it would have hit her.

The big driving propellers paused.

And Jack saved Fritz's life without knowing it.

No sooner was the dynamo stopped, when the current ceased, and Fritz fell to the floor half senseless.

His hands were covered with blisters where the current burned him.

Tim had told Charley what Jack said, and then asked:

"Whar's ther Dutchman?"

"Below, oiling the machinery."

"I'll call him," said Tim.

He gave the yell at that moment, and Tim, with a startled look upon his bearded face, hastened to the trap.

Peering down, he saw Fritz lying on his back near the dynamo.

"Hey!" roared the sailor in alarm. "Wot's ther matter wi' yer?"

No reply came back.

It increased Tim's fear.

He hastily crept into the place.

When he saw Fritz unconscious, he gasped:

"Jerusalem! Is ther lubber dead? Wot's happened?"

Then he dragged the Dutchman out.

Getting him into the kitchen, Fritz began to revive.

Finally he gasped:

"Gief me some oil—gwick!"

Tim handed him the olive oil and he wet his hands with it.

"Fer ther Lord's sake, wot ails yer?" gasped the sailor.

"I vos by der tynamo got shocked vunct."

"Oh, gee! Wot did yer do that fer?"

"Dot vos a oxcidents. Got some whitskey?"

"Ay, ay!" said Tim, handing him a bottle.

The Dutchman was treated much like a drowned person, and finally was able to get upon his feet.

He then explained what happened to him.

When he afterwards discovered how the generator happened to be stopped at just the right moment, he was amazed.

His hands were very sore, but his system soon recovered from the awful shock, and he pluckily seized a pneumatic rifle and went on deck with Tim and Charley.

Jack had sent the air-ship down until she hovered above the ship, and then shouted through the bull's-eye.

"Ship ahoy!"

"Ahoy!" was the answer.

"What's the matter, there?"

"None of your business!"

"I demand an explanation."

"You won't get it!"

"Then we'll attack you."

"If you don't veer off we'll fire at you!"

"You'll rue it, if you do."

To show that he meant what he said, the second mate of the ship ordered his men to send a volley up at the Rocket.

It was done at once.

A shower of bullets rattled against the machine.

They were incapable of piercing the aluminum, however, and fell back harmlessly into the sea.

Just then a smothered voice in the cabin yelled:

"Help! Help! Help!"

"We'll assist you!" replied Jack.

"My crew have mutined, and want to kill us."

"Cheer up! We'll subdue the rascals!"

Jack now came out on deck with a brace of pistols in his hands.

"Go for them, boys!" he exclaimed. "Don't let them hit you though. Fire to wound—not to kill. Be careful there now!"

The pneumatic rifles were then discharged.

Only the thud of released air came from them.

The bullets they discharged were regular torpedoes.

As soon as they struck an object they burst with loud reports and scattered the rent fragments in all directions.

Where they lodged in the mutineers' bodies or limbs and exploded, great pieces of flesh were blown out.

Such an appalling fusillade as this was unbearable.

The mutineers shot back for a while, but their men went down so fast, and they so signally failed to reach the Rocket's crew, that they soon became very much discouraged.

Unable at last to stand the destructive fire, or reach any sort of shelter to retaliate from, the all made a rush for the fore-castle and open hatches and took refuge down below.

"Now we've got them!" cried Jack. "They are whipped!"

"Dey vos a preddy tough cang," said the pugnacious young Dutchman. "Led's gone down und finish dem."

"We'll go down and lock them below. Lower her, Fritz!"

The Dutchman hastened into the wheel room.

He then sent the Rocket down until she hovered beside the ship's bulwarks a few yards above the sea.

Just then the cabin door opened.

The captain, first mate, cook, and three foremast hands who had refused to join the mutineers rushed out.

They locked the companion door and fastened on the hatches.

Every one of the mutineers were wounded.

There was no need for Jack to board the ship.

The deck was strewn with the bodies of eight men whom Jack and his companions had wounded, and the officers tied them hand and foot and dragged them into the cabin.

Then the captain hastened over to the side where the Rocket floated.

"Allow me to thank you for what you have done!" he exclaimed, earnestly. "You have saved our lives from those scoundrels."

"What caused the mutiny?"

"I scolded them for carrying liquor aboard. The quarrel grew from bad to worse day by day. Finally I started in to take the liquor away from them. That started the fight."

"You were justified."

"Of course I was. They are a hard crowd."

"Did they have you cooped up long in the cabin?"

"Two days. We had no food or water, and they had plenty, so you see they would have won if you hadn't come."

"Can you get along now?"

"Oh, yes. I'll keep them confined below and starve them into submission. They'll soon be glad enough to behave."

"Then we will go on across the Atlantic."

"Will you tell me what that thing is?"

"A flying machine," Jack answered.

He then gave the captain a brief account of the Rocket, and bidding him good-bye, Jack sent the machine up in the air.

She passed into the clouds, and the sailors lost track of her.

Three days afterwards the Rocket ran into a terrific gale of wind and rain, and it carried her far to the northward.

It was such a terrific tempest that Jack found the Rocket to be almost unmanageable in its grasp.

He therefore put a large quantity of the gas compound into the retorts and the machine rose up to a height of five miles from the sea level, and got above the storm.

Here she was in such a cold, bleak region that the crew had to put on their furs, and start the heat radiators to prevent themselves from freezing to death.

The rare atmosphere was filled with needles of ice, and while the moon and stars shone big and glaring like powerful electric lights, the earth was hidden from view by the clouds.

Along through this cold silent region they ran in a strong strata of air until at last the continent of Europe appeared ahead.

CHAPTER VII.

TALKING TO THE CZAR.

"THERE is St. Petersburg now, Mr. Wright!"

"Ah, yes! I see the city. Turn the search-light to the left, Woods."

The flying machine was hovering 2,000 feet above the Imperial city, and the gun-shaped search-light was projected from the bow, and its light, shaped like a huge funnel, shot down from the sky.

It was a dark night, and the silvery halo had a ghostly look that attracted the attention of many of the Russians.

They thronged the streets, house tops, doors and windows, glaring up at the enormous, bird-like object hanging in the heavens.

Every one thought it was a balloon.

Foreign nations were using them experimentally for military purposes, and the Russians suspected that this was a French machine.

"We have created a great stir among them," laughed Jack.

"Yes. Everybody is excited, and pointing up at us."

"I'm going down to interview the Czar, and get a ukase from him, demanding the surrender of my ship and crew from his Siberian officials. That will strengthen our prospects."

"They may not give you the paper."

"Well, it won't hurt to try for it."

"Suppose they arrest you."

"Oh, I'll run chances on that."

Jack apprised Tim and Fritz of his intention.

They thereupon got ready for the landing.

Jack let out some of the gas, and they settled down.

The Rocket was steered toward the palace, and landed in a great handsome square, the flanges flying out to hold her propellers from touching the ground, and Jack stopped the machinery.

Thousands of people surrounded her.

The police drove them back, and a troop of the Imperial guard came up to the spot to find out who our friends were.

Jack went up on the platform.

As the officer of the guard came up, he demanded in the Russian tongue:

"From whence does that balloon come?"

"America," replied Jack, in the same language.

"Indeed! And why have you come here?"

"To see the Czar!"

"His Imperial Majesty is in the palace."

"Then conduct me to his presence at once."

"Alight, sir."

Jack told Charley to accompany him and bidding Tim and Fritz remain aboard to guard the air-ship, he left the Rocket.

Most of the guardsmen remained around the air-ship with the civil officers, and Jack and the sailor were conducted to the palace.

There within a large audience chamber, the young inventor met the Russian Emperor to whom he introduced himself.

He then stated his case.

The Czar listened to him in silence.

When Jack finished speaking, he said:

"I regret the annoyance to which you have been subjected, sir. I shall furnish you with an order for the release of your ship and men. I am glad you have forbore making this seizure a question of national dispute. And the guilty people shall be punished for their misdeed."

He thereupon spoke to one of the officers with him.

The man retired to an anteroom.

Emboldened by his success, Jack now said:

"Your highness, I now desire to call your attention to another piece of rascality perpetrated by one of your subjects."

"To what do you allude?"

"A vile plot concocted by man named Peter Darinka, to dispossess an orphan boy named Ivan Janova of a large fortune."

"Both Russians?"

"Residents of this city."

"Explain yourself!"

Jack then told the Czar all about the boy.

At the conclusion of his narrative, the Emperor despatched a page for the head of the police department.

While he was gone, the Czar engaged Jack in a pleasant conversation about the Electric Air Rocket, the inventor explaining all about it.

The recital interested him very much.

He asked Jack if he would sell him the Rocket.

The young inventor politely refused, saying he was not in need of money, as he had all he wanted.

A few moments afterward, the order for the release of Jack's crew and ship were handed to him, and the chief of the police entered.

The Czar questioned him about the exile of Ivan Janova.

"Your royal highness," said the chief, "the arrest, conviction and exile of Ivan Janova were perfectly proper in every respect. We were apprised by one of our secret police agents, named Peter Darinka, that the boy was a member of the Nihilists' gang. When we raided the house in which they secretly met, we found the boy among the plotters. I most humbly and respectfully oppose his release. He is convicted for treason. He was caught in the act."

"Mr. Wright," said the Czar, "your request for his release is not granted. We must conform to the strictest letter of the law."

"Very well," replied the inventor in chagrined tones. "The poor boy is one of your own subjects. You have an absolute monarchy here, and therefore possess the right to follow the dictates of your own will. But in all justice, I beg to ask if you will not vindicate the boy in case it is proven that Peter Darinka was guilty of perjury in giving false evidence against him, and for conspiring to make him appear guilty when he is in reality perfectly innocent."

"Should what you say be proven, I will certainly pardon the boy, restore his rights, and punish Peter Darinka."

"Thank you for that assurance. I shall now make an attempt to vindicate the boy. If I succeed, I trust you will grant him the privileges asked for."

Jack then took his leave of the Czar:

The sailor had heard all that was said.

"You have done nobly, sir, in securing that paper, and in making an effort to exonerate the boy exile of Siberia."

"I am mortified over my failure to secure Ivan's release."

"It is very evident that the police are prejudiced against the little fellow, and influenced the Czar's refusal to grant your request."

"Yes, and they have been hoodwinked by Darinka, in whom they seem to have the most unbounded confidence."

"What can you do to vindicate the boy?"

"Rescue him from the Siberian mines."

"And then?"

"I can't prophesy so far ahead."

They strode back to the air-ship and mingled with the crowd.

As they did so, Jack's glance suddenly fell upon a man standing among them, glancing at the air-ship, whose features wrung the startled exclamation from his lips:

"There stands Darinka now!"

"Where?" eagerly asked Charley.

"Ahead of us to the right—the big fellow."

"The one wearing the fur hat and cape?"

"Yes, that's the villain."

"He is watching the Rocket."

"Yes, and I'm going to carry him up with me."

"What for?"

"To make him confess his guilt."

"You'll have to carry him away bodily then."

"That's just what I intend to do."

"How can I help you?"

"According to circumstances."

As Jack said this, he dashed forward, caught the man by the back of the neck and rushed him toward the Rocket.

He thought somebody was playing a practical joke on him and he began to swear and struggle to get away.

But Jack was possessed of extraordinary strength, and the man found himself utterly helpless in the inventor's hands.

Charley followed them, and several officers dashed forward to stop them, as they did not recognize them.

Reaching the air ship Jack suddenly lifted Darinka up in his arms and hurled him violently up on the Rocket.

Tim and Fritz saw him, and pounced on Darinka.

"Hold him, boys!" cried Jack.

"Ay, ay!" grimly answered the sailor.

"Come on, Charley."

"Look out for the police!"

They both ran up the short ladder, for a number of officers were close at their heels, and Darinka was yelling for help.

"Charley, raise the Rocket—quick, while I hold them at bay!"

"I'll have to make more gas, Mr. Wright."

"You know how, don't you?"

"Of course!"

And inside he dashed.

Jack pulled up the ladder.

The sailor and Dutchman were in the after depression struggling furiously to hold Darinka, who was fighting desperately.

"Release that man!" roared one of the officers.

"Never!" retorted Jack, quickly.

"We'll make you then!"

A rush was made for the machine, and the officers began to climb up her sides, while the mob of thousands let out an angry roar and surged in toward the Rocket.

They looked upon Jack's act as an outrage, as they did not know anything of the circumstances.

In a moment more the air-ship was surrounded by a howling mass of humanity, bent upon wreaking vengeance upon the young inventor.

Jack had a revolver in his pocket, and withdrawing it he aimed at the officers and shouted angrily:

"Back with you! The first man who dares to come up here will get shot. Back—back, I say!"

The sight of the pistol enraged the people.

A fearful yell pealed from them, and they hurled a shower of missiles at the daring young inventor.

CHAPTER VIII.

A COLLISION.

"For Heaven's sake, Charley, hurry up or I'll get killed!"

"I'll be ready soon. The gas has got to generate to lift us, sir."

"Fritz, haven't you got Darinka yet?"

"Shiminey Christmas—no! He fighd like der tuyfel!"

"Fire at 'em if they boards us!" roared Tim.

Jack received many a stinging blow from the missiles, but did not flinch, and his menacing pistol drove the policemen back and caused a stampede in the mob.

As they surged away from around the air-ship, some of them were knocked down and trampled, others nearly had the life squeezed out of them, and many were badly hurt.

Within a few moments the soldiers came galloping up, and Jack's heart sank, for he knew that they would soon get the best of him with their weapons.

The police were entirely in sympathy with Darinka of course, as they had recognized him as a detective, but were afraid of Jack's revolver, for the inventor had a dangerous look about him.

Just then Tim and Fritz had their hands so full they could do nothing to help him, and he feared his plan would fail.

The crowd recovered.

They began to rush back.

That gave the policemen confidence.

But just as they reached the machine she rose.

Up she glided, and a mighty roar escaped the crowd.

There was a grapnel rope hanging down, and the crowd seized it when the machine had ascended to a height of fifty feet, and prevented her going any higher.

Then they commenced to pull her down.

Foreseeing the danger of their success, Jack took out his pocket knife, and, hastening up to the bow, gashed the line. It parted with a report like a pistol shot.

The Rocket was released and flew upward at a bound, and the excited crowd hoarsely yelled again when they saw how their purpose was thwarted.

The chagrined officers shot up at her, but simply wasted their ammunition, as the bullets failed to do any damage.

Up, up, up, they mounted swiftly, and Jack rushed aft and lending his friends his assistance, they conquered Darinka.

He was bound hand and foot and gagged.

Jack then hastened to the wheel room.

He found Charley looking somewhat alarmed over having, in his excitement, put too much of the gas chemicals in the tank.

It was easy to remedy this by opening one of the valves and allowing some of it to escape.

The machine rose no higher than 1,500 feet, and then sped away to the eastward, and our friends finally retired for the night, leaving Tim on duty at the wheel.

On the following morning Jack brought Darinka his breakfast, and when he fed the rascal he said to the Russian:

"You see fate has conspired to throw you into my power. I have only just recovered entirely from the wound you gave me in the head, and I know you shot to kill me. But I've baffled your attempt, and now I am going to avenge myself."

Darinka turned very pale under his bushy beard, and a look of intense alarm flashed from his wicked black eyes, as he said:

"Don't you kill me!"

"I ought to," sternly replied Jack.

"But I didn't fire at you in Wrightstown."

"Oh, yes, you did. I've had an American detective after you, and he has notified me of all your villainy in St. Petersburg."

"Perhaps he lied to you."

"Oh, no. I'm here to rescue your victim."

"You never can!" said Darinka, in a sudden burst of triumph.

"There's where you are mistaken. I know where he is, and when I liberate him, I'm going to have you punished."

"Then you don't intend to kill me now?"

"Perhaps not. You can save your neck by confessing to the conspiracy you were engaged in to put Ivan Janova out of the way."

"You couldn't torture me into making any such confession."

"We shall see," replied Jack, quietly. "Don't be overconfident."

As it was then impossible to get any information out of the man, Jack left him to his own reflections.

The young inventor then viewed the country they were flying over.

Beneath them laid the flat province of Viatka, with the Ural mountains off to the eastward, and several rivers winding like silver thread over the landscape, in tortuous courses.

There were few clouds in the sky, a gentle breeze was blowing, the sun shone down strongly, and the few villages who discerned the air-ship imagined she was a great bird.

Fritz had taken the wheel, and Tim went up on the platform and joined Jack, at the same time asking him:

"Did yer git any information out o' ther land shark?"

"Not a bit. He's inclined to be obstinate."

"Can't we make him confess his guilt?"

"Probably, if force is resorted to."

"Are yer tackin' fer ther Siberian mines, now?"

"No—the Gulf of Obi, where my ship lies."

"When d'yer reckon on gettin' thar?"

"To-morrow or next day."

Tim took a chew of plug, and gazed reflectively over the landscape a few moments, then he asked:

"S'posen they refuses ter obey ther Czar's order?"

"Then I'll resort to force of arms to recover my property."

"Ay, now; that's ther right sperrit ter show. I recollect when I wuz aboard o' ther ole frigate Wabash, how I once took a hull fleet o' ships wi' one gun."

"One gun aboard the whole fleet?" laughed Jack.

"Lordy no. I mean, we only had one gun aboard o' ther ole frigate wot could be used. Ther rest wuz spiked."

"I don't see through that, Tim."

"Why, it's werry plain. I'll explain ther sitiuation ter yer. We wuz runnin' a blockade durin' ther war, guardin' ther entrance ter Port R'yal, when we seen one o' ther enemy's ships acomin', an' tacked arter her. It wuz a werry dark night, an' we chased her inter a bay. Scarcely wuz we inside, when wot d'yer s'pose?"

"Well, what?"

"Afore yer could wink yer eye we wuz surrounded by forty-four men o' war, an' we didn't hev a gun loaded. Waal, sir, thar we wuz, an' they grapneled us and took us prisoners an' spiked our guns. Wot wuz we ter do, stowed away down in ther hold o' one o' ther enemy's ships? I'll tell yer. I crept up ter one o' ther winders, an' droppin' overboard, I swum ter ther Wabash an' got aboard. Thar wuz a prize crew o' ten men aboard o' her. I laid 'em out with a belay-

in' pin, an' aimin' one o' ther guns at ther enemy's fleet I fired. Ther shot went clean through fifty-eight o' them ships below ther water line, as they stood in a row, an' ther five other wessels——"

"There were forty-four in the fleet originally. Where did the other nineteen war ships come from, Tim?" asked Jack.

"Did I say that?" asked Tim, soberly.

"Yes, and you said none of the guns were loaded, yet you found one all ready to discharge, and sent that solitary ball flying through fifty-seven times as many ships as it could have pierced."

"I reckon I've made a mistake."

"A big one at that," chuckled Jack.

"Waal, let it pass. As I wuz asayin', ther ships all sunk but five, an' they fled fer thar lives. Then, when they wuz gone I went aboard ther wessel whar my messmates wuz an' liberated 'em——"

"There you go, off the track again," interposed Jack.

"No, I didn't," asserted Tim, in injured tones.

"Yes, you are. All the ships sunk but five and they got away. Now what ship was left for you to get your friends from?"

Tim blinked his useful eye and pondered.

He couldn't imagine where he was going to rake up the necessary ship, no matter how hard he thought about it.

So he finally remarked in rather sheepish tones:

"I reckon I'll go and take my trick at ther wheel!"

"It won't be your turn for two hours yet!" Jack sung out after him, as he stumped rapidly away.

But Tim pretended that he didn't hear Jack and dove into the wheel room, overwhelmed with confusion.

Jack laughed at him and remained on the platform an hour or more scanning the land ahead, until finally they drew close to the rugged mountains.

The aspect of the scenery had rapidly been changing to a cold, cheerless wintry scene, and by the time they reached the mountains a blinding snowstorm fell.

The wind came over the mountains in sharp, cutting blasts, and Fritz was obliged to steer by the compass.

Jack passed inside and posted Charley on lookout.

Glancing at the bareometer, he saw that they were then less than two thousand feet in the air, although more gas had been made.

The storm made Jack feel uneasy, and he finally said:

"You had better slacken speed some here, Fritz."

"For why?" asked the Dutchman, in some surprise.

"It is impossible to see ahead more than a dozen yards."

"Und I vos got der full bower ohf der search-light on, too."

Fritz slackened the speed of the driving wheels.

It did not do much good though, for the wind shifted around, and drove her along with it.

Charley kept a sharp lookout.

His vigilance was finally rewarded.

He caught view of a dark object ahead, and at one sharp glance observed it was a huge mountain towering up ahead.

"Port!" he shouted. "Come about—quick!"

Startled by his words, Fritz sent the wheel flying around, and the bow of the machine turned.

But she was too late.

The wind caught her.

She was hurled ahead like a gunshot.

The next moment she struck with a violent crash.

CHAPTER IX.

BEAR AND WOLVES.

"WE have run into a forest!" shouted Jack to his startled friends.

The fearful crackling and snapping sound that came from the breaking branches plainly proved this.

Carried on by the gale, they swept through the breaking boughs until, with a sudden shock, the Rocket ran into a crotch between two big branches, and stuck fast there.

Jack had already stopped the driving wheels.

The gale howled around them, and the snowflakes came down in thick, blinding sheets that obscured everything.

Jack hastened up on deck and glanced around.

He saw that the Rocket was tightly wedged in a big tree, her bow rudder was broken, and she lay with her stern hanging down at an acute angle. Two of the driving wheels were injured.

The snow-covered ground was twenty feet below.

He was joined by his friends, who quickly observed the situation.

"We are caught in a trap!" he exclaimed.

"How d'yer 'spect ter git out o' here?" asked Tim.

"By sawing off one of those branches and going up higher. We will have to land and repair the damage. Was any machinery broken inside?"

"Nein," replied Fritz. "I jüst vos down ter seen me dot."

Jack then directed his friends how to act, and taking a saw from the tool box he climbed down a branch and got beneath the Rocket.

There he began to cut the branch.

The weight of the flying machine pressing down upon it aided him, and in a short time the branch gave away with a crash, its clutch on the Rocket was released and she bounded up in the air.

Unluckily for Jack he did not expect the branch to give away so suddenly, and it came down on him and knocked him from the tree.

He fell to the ground.

The bough fell on top of him.

It was a very heavy one and pinned him down.

There he lay, almost breathless and half stunned.

When he revived and tried to liberate himself he found his strength unequal to the task.

"By jingo!" he gasped, "I'm caught so I can't move."

He made another desperate effort, but it proved to be as useless as the first, and panting and exhausted he paused again.

Jack could not see anything of the Rocket.

She had gone straight up into the air, and vanished in the flakes.

"They will search for me when they land," he thought, as half an hour passed by. "I'd better yell, to attract them."

He then began to shout for his friends.

His voice sounded dull and smothered in the storm.

Jack received no reply.

He did not lose courage, however.

"They may have landed at a considerable distance from here," he cogitated. "If so, they would not be likely to hear me until they begin to search. I'll shout at intervals, and—ah! what's that?"

A crackling in the bushes among the trees met his ears.

He listened intently.

"Hello!" he shouted. "Who's that?"

No answer was returned.

But presently the crackling sound was repeated.

A loud snuffing and snorting accompanied it.

Jack was puzzled.

Gazing in the direction it came from, he was suddenly alarmed by hearing a heavy, deep growl.

A moment afterwards the bushes parted and a huge white bear came from among them.

The beast was covered with shaggy fur, and had a lean, gaunt body, fiery little eyes, and a most savage mien.

It stood a moment glaring hungrily at Jack, and then moved toward him at a clumsy, shambling gait.

The inventor made a desperate effort again to get out from beneath the heavy branch, but failed.

"He's half starved, and will devour me," he muttered. "And the worst of it is I can't move about to defend myself."

He had a sheath knife in his belt, but could not reach it.

Keeping his glance fixed upon the bear, he saw the beast

coming toward him, and fairly held his breath when it reached his head.

Jack remained perfectly quiet.

He knew the first movement would invite an attack.

The big beast snuffed around his face, arms and body, sending a cold chill through the helpless inventor, for he did not know at what moment it would bury its teeth into him.

Having finished its inspection of that much of Jack's body, the animal next proceeded toward his legs, and ambling over the enormous trunk and branches of the heavy bough, it rooted down around the inventor's feet.

The limb laid across Jack's ribs, almost crushing them by its weight, for it had the girth of a fair sized tree.

He could not see over the trunk, but could feel the animal poking around the half of his body on the other side of it.

Presently the bear came back toward his head.

Jack had made a desperate attempt to get his knife, and it saw him moving his arms unsuccessfully.

A savage roar pealed from its red mouth.

It then made a rush for his head.

There could be no mistaking its purpose.

The beast designed to tear him to pieces.

"Heavens!" gasped Jack; then he shouted: "Help! Help!"

Just as the brute was about to pounce upon him there came the sharp crack of a revolver, and a bullet hit the bear.

"All right, my hearty!" cried Tim's cheery voice.

It electrified Jack.

He saw the old sailor hastening toward him.

The bullet had wounded the bear in the neck.

It whined with pain, and turning away from Jack, charged upon its assailant furiously.

Tim had five shots left in his pistol, and was a good marksman.

He paused, and emptied every chamber of his weapon into the body of the bear with unerring precision.

The fusillade brought the animal to a dead stop, and the last shot sent it rolling over on the ground as dead as a door nail.

Up to Jack limped the plucky old sailor.

"Gee whiz," he cried in alarm; "are yer hull stove in, lad?"

"I'm almost crushed under this branch," groaned Jack.

"Here comes Fritz! We'll soon git yer out o' thar."

"Where's the bear?"

"Dead!"

"That's lucky!"

"Goin' ter eat yer?"

"Yes. You arrived just in time to save me."

Attracted by the reports of the pistol, Fritz approached.

Explanations were useless, as the scene spoke for itself.

He and Tim then seized the heavy bough and lifted it, whereupon Jack crawled from under it and got upon his feet.

It was some time ere he felt like himself again, for his fall had shocked him, and the bough had scratched, bruised and cut him when it fell down across his body.

He ached all over.

As soon as he felt like himself again he asked:

"Where did you land the Rocket?"

"In a clearin' some ten cables' length from here," answered Tim.

"Was she badly damaged?"

"Wuss nor we reckoned."

"How did you chance to come this way?"

"Heerd ye hailin' fer help."

"Fritz, secure some of the bear's meat for our larder."

"Sure I vill," replied the Dutchman.

"I'll go back to the air-ship if you lead the way, Tim."

"Ther tracks in ther snow'll guide us, my lad."

"Sure enough; come on."

Leaving Fritz cutting away the choicest parts of the bear, they returned to the air-ship, which Charley was guarding.

He was informed of what had happened.

Jack then made a close inspection of the flying machine, and found that she actually was in worse condition than he supposed.

While he was so employed, he heard Fritz's voice in the distance yelling furiously, and with a startled look Jack cried:

"The Dutchman is in trouble!"

"His voice is heavin' this way," added Tim.

"Can you distinguish what he says?" asked Charley.

They listened intently.

Presently they plainly made out Fritz yelling:

"Volves—volves!"

It startled them and they armed themselves.

Rushing in the direction the voice proceeded from, they soon saw Fritz running toward them with a big portion of the bear's meat carried upon his shoulder.

He was pursued by a pack of ravenous wolves, whose howls made up a most frightful and discordant din.

The half starved brutes had scented the carcass of the slain bear, and came trooping from all directions to devour it.

Fritz having secured the portion he wanted did not propose to let them have it, and started off on a run with the meat.

Half of the pack remained to eat the carcass.

The rest chased the Dutchman to get his meat away from him and would probably have devoured him too, for they were all crowding around him, snapping at his legs, jumping up against him to get the meat away, and almost knocked him down several times.

He clung tenaciously to the meat, however.

As soon as Jack and the rest saw his peril, they opened fire upon the hungry brutes.

Down went many of them dead in their tracks, and up to the three dashed the panting Dutchman.

The wolves were not intimidated by the shots for they were nearly famished, and desperately eager to get the bear's meat.

They rushed on, and when Fritz reached his friends the savage beasts surrounded them in a dense, furious pack.

CHAPTER X

THE CZAR'S ORDER.

ASTONISHED at the audacity of the wolves, the crew of the Rocket fired among them right and left.

Down they fell by the dozen, and the four retreated toward the air ship, when an overwhelming rush was made by the beasts, and several of them sprang at the bear meat.

Fastening their teeth into it, they pulled Fritz over upon the ground, and to save his life he was forced to let go.

Like a flash the whole pack pounced upon it.

A snarling, yelping, pulling and biting took place among the desperate animals, and Fritz was going to make a dive for his prize to try to recover it, when Jack shouted:

"Hold on, Fritz; let them have it."

"Lieber Gott! gief it ab afder all mein drubblen ter keeb id?"

"Yes; they'd tear you to pieces if you touched it now."

"Shack, I don't vant ter——"

"No objections! Retreat to the Rocket."

"For what?"

"They may tackle us next."

Reluctant as Fritz was to do this, he could not fail to see that the young inventor's judgment was best.

Therefore they all hastened away, leaving the snarling wolves fighting each other like demons for possession of the meat.

As soon as they got up on deck of the air-ship, they opened fire on the wolves again.

The appetites of those that remained alive had become so frenzied that they pounced upon their dead companions and began to eat them like cannibals.

Finally, however, they fled.

Jack then set to work upon the Rocket.

The gloom of night fell before she was finished.

Our friends could hear the wolves howling in the woods all night long, and occasionally their glaring eyes and scurrying bodies were seen among the trees around the air-ship.

On the following morning the snowstorm stopped.

Jack then went into the wheel-room, and raised the Rocket up into the air so that she would clear the trees.

She was then steered for the Mount Katchkanar pass; and going through the mountains, found herself hovering over Siberia.

Jack directed her to the northeast.

When she reached the Obi river, she was turned northward.

Following the great river to the point where it emptied into the gulf, Jack caught view of the town of Obdorsk.

It was late in the night when they sighted the place, and the inventor pointed down at the glimmering lights, and said:

"There's the place where my ship is kept."

"Yes—that's the very town I escaped from," replied Charley.

"I can see a number of ships in the harbor now."

"Are you going to descend upon them to-night?"

"By all means. I'll take them by surprise."

"Very well, sir. You'll find a brutal crowd there."

"A few shells from the electric gun will soon subdue them."

"I hope they won't give us cause to use it."

"Tell Tim and Fritz to prepare for war."

Charley saluted and left the room to carry out this order. Left alone, Jack peered down at Obdorsk.

It laid at the mouth of the Polvoi river.

The moon and stars gleamed down coldly from the cloudless sky upon the collection of stone and wooden houses.

It was not very late, and many of the inhabitants were abroad in the snowy streets.

Floating in the water were a number of ships.

Jack turned on the search-light, and slanted its powerful rays down upon the vessels.

By the aid of a telescope he soon distinguished the very craft he was in search of, and muttered:

"There she is now. The light has attracted attention."

He sent the Rocket earthward, and saw the people swarming out of their houses to look at her, filled with fear and surprise.

The *oblast*, or province into which the Rocket was falling, was under the administration of a despotic *bojar*, or nobleman, and a *veche*, or common council, who did pretty much as they pleased with the peasants and burghers of that region.

Serfdom had been abolished long before.

A garrison of *streltzi*, or soldiers, were in the town, and like nearly all Russian cities, this place had its prison and mines, for convicts were often sent there in exile from Russia.

Jack knew just what he had to expect.

But he had no fear, as he was backed up by an order direct from the Czar, and as the Emperor was feared, he expected no trouble.

Tim and Fritz were out on deck, watching the scene from below with great interest.

"Dey must tink ve vos der moon comin' down," laughed the Dutchman.

"I wouldn't want to be in thar boots," replied Tim. "Durin' a ingagemint when I wuz in ther navy, I once stood at ther wheel steerin' ther ole frigate Wahash, when a big shell came down from the sky toward my head. I dassen't leave ther wheel neither, canse if I did, ther ship'd a-been lost. Wot did I do?"

"Ach, I don't care or know dot."

"I'll tell yer. Seem' as my skylights would a-been taken off, I jist braced myself, raised my hands, an' caught that bombshell as slick as a center fielder in a base ball nine would catch a home run fly ball. Afore it had a chance ter

bust, I ups an' chucks it back at ther ship wot it came from, which wuz only ten cables' length away——"

"Vot! Yer trowed a punshell mit yer hands 7,200 feet?"

"Ay, that I did," calmly asserted Tim. "An' wot's more, it landed atop o' ther enemy's deck, busted thar, an' blowed ther ship ter pieces."

"Ach, Gott fergief yer!"

"Wot fer?"

"Dot lie!"

Before Tim could retort the air-ship reached the ground, and the people rushed away in the wildest alarm.

From a distance they watched the Rocket.

When they saw that it was nothing supernatural, their confidence was restored and they approached her.

Foremost among them was the autocratic bojar, who ruled the town with a rod of iron, and behind him came all his councilors, guards and streltzi, armed to the teeth.

The tyrant paused doubtfully near the Rocket, eyed her a brief time, and then roared with an assumption of great ferocity:

"How dare you enter the town in that manner?"

Jack heard him, and went up on deck with Charley.

The young inventor stared at the man with undisguised contempt, and then said, in the most cutting manner, in the Russian tongue:

"Say, my man, I wish you to tell me where I can find the miserable object who rules this town. Be quick about it, too!"

"What!" yelled the nobleman, flying into a passion.

"Miserable object did you say? Why, confound your impudence, I am the bojar!"

He emphasized the word "I," and flourished his hand, pointing to himself with such a grand, self-important air that Jack laughed outright.

But he gave the pompous rascal a cold stare from head to foot, and then exclaimed in tones of extreme incredulity:

"What! You? Impossible!"

"Why impossible, you scoundrel?"

"Because I expected to meet a gentleman."

"Oh!" howled the aristocrat wildly to his minions. "Do you hear that?"

"Well," said Jack, in calm tones, "I did not come here to bandy words with you, but to punish you for stealing my ship, the American Eagle, which I see lying at anchor in the river."

"Your ship?"

"My ship, sir!"

"So you have come to take her?"

"I have, as you will find out."

"Well, I like your audacity. Come down from there."

"For what purpose?" demanded Jack, quietly.

"So that I may have my men beat you with the knout."

"They won't do that, but I'll descend," said Jack.

He thereupon went down to the ground, followed by Charley, and the soldiers closed in around them immediately.

"I'll take the starch out of them presently, Charley," laughed Jack.

"That's the brute who confiscated our ship and imprisoned the crew."

"You'll see him pull in his horns in a moment."

Just then the bojar shouted in angry tones to the soldiers:

"Make prisoners of those dogs!"

The streltzi started in to do so, when Jack exclaimed:

"Pause, as you value your lives!"

"Go on! Do as I tell you!" thundered the bojar.

"There's a gun on that air ship aimed at you," proceeded Jack, "and if you budge an inch my friends will fire it and kill you!"

This warning had the desired effect.

All the soldiers paused.

The bojar by this time was frantic.

"Cowards!" he yelled, rushing forward, "if you are afraid to arrest him, I shall do it myself."

He reached Jack and stretched out his hand to seize the inventor.

"Hold on!" exclaimed our hero, drawing the Czar's message from his pocket and thrusting it into the nobleman's hand. "Do not be too hasty, my good fellow. Read that paper!"

"I'll read nothing!" hissed the other, hurling it to the ground and jumping on it. "You are my prisoner."

"Do you know what that paper is?"

"I don't care!"

"Oh, yes, you will!"

"Sir!"

"It is an order from the Czar!"

"What?" yelled the *bojar*, turning pale.

"You need not heed it. It is immaterial to me."

"Hand it to me!" gasped the nobleman.

"Pick it up yourself. You threw it down."

Like a whipped dog the man wilted.

All his overbearing hauteur fled ignominiously.

He stooped down, picked up the order, opened, and read it.

"Merciful God!" he cried, in horror. "What have I done?"

CHAPTER XI.

THE PARROT HAS ITS EYE OPEN.

A HUSH fell upon the multitude.

They saw that something very important had happened to agitate the *bojar* so strongly, and heard him cry in abject tones:

"Pardon me—pardon me, Mr. Wright! I was crazy—I knew not what I was doing! Have pity on me! Do not report this matter to the Emperor! It will be as much as my life is worth!"

"Do you recognize your error at last, you poor fool?" sternly asked Jack, a contemptuous smile upon his face as he observed how the man dropped all his airs and acted with meek humility.

"I do indeed," replied the nobleman. "Will you promise—"

"You shall get no promises from me until you have made full restitution and ample compensation to my men."

"It shall be done, sir!"

"At once!"

"In one hour the ship and cargo, with the crew aboard, can leave the gulf, well paid for any injury they have suffered."

"That will suit me. Go ahead. I shall remain here and see that you do your duty well, too."

Dispersing the crowd, the *bojar* sent a large gang of men to get the American Eagle in working order.

He also sent some men to liberate the crew and put them on their ship, and humbly excusing himself from Jack, he hastened away to superintend the work in hand.

As soon as it became known that our friends held great authority from the monarch of Siberia, the crowd treated them with the most respectful obsequiousness.

Jack and Charley returned aboard the Rocket, and telling Tim and Fritz the news, they all enjoyed a hearty laugh at the expense of the *bojar* and his minions.

Promptly at the end of an hour the nobleman came back and announced that the ship was ready.

"I wish to know," said Jack, "what right you had to seize her?"

"She was on a fishing expedition within the waters of the Gulf," replied the *bojar*. "She was therefore trespassing, and I had a legal right to take her. Your country has no treaty with this one to poach our fish. The neutrality law prohibits it."

"But we did not fish in this gulf!" replied Charley, vehemently.

"What do you know about it, sir?"

"I am the one of the crew who escaped."

"Oh! I see. But we presumed you did."

"Without evidence, you had no right to convict. We merely entered the gulf to escape getting nipped by the shore ice in the Kara sea."

"I am atoning all I can, sir."

"Should this rascality occur again on your part," said Jack, severely, "I have the Czar's word for it that you will perish."

"You may depend that I shall never permit it again. If you will come with me I will show you the ship."

Jack and Charley assented.

They were conducted to the shore and rowed to the ship. All the crew were aboard, looking very bad after the barbarous treatment they had undergone.

Their astonishment and delight were intense when given their freedom, and these feelings were augmented when they saw Charley and heard how it had been effected.

Cheer after cheer pealed from their lips for Jack and the plucky sailor, and then the inventor asked the captain:

"What compensation has the *bojar* made you?"

"He gave each of us two hundred roubles of 100 kopecks each, worth about 54 and one quarter cents each. In U. S. coin it will amount to \$108.50 apiece. This he said was payment for our services in the mines."

"Are you all satisfied with that sum?"

"More than satisfied, sir."

"Are the ship and cargo just as they were when confiscated?"

"Yes, sir; we have not lost a thing."

"Then you may continue your voyage and when you have a full cargo return to Wrightstown with it."

"And I'm going on with Mr. Wright," added Charley.

After some further talk Jack and Charley parted with the crew.

They returned to the air-ship, accompanied by the *bojar*.

"Are you satisfied?" he asked, anxiously.

"Thoroughly," answered Jack, with a nod.

"Do you bear me any malice?"

"None in particular, since you have atoned."

"Will you promise not to report me for punishment to the Czar?"

"I will promise you that."

"Then seal the compact by eating salt with me."

He tended Jack a beautiful gold salt box, from which the inventor took a pinch, and placed it in his mouth.

That satisfied the noble.

He refused to take back the box.

"Keep it as a gift of good faith from me," said he.

"Very well. Good-night," said Jack, and he passed inside.

The Rocket ascended in the starlit sky, and the inhabitants of Obdorsk watched her until she dwindled away in the heavens.

Jack was delighted with the success of his work.

"I have probably saved the lives of the crew," said he, "and saved the Fishing Company thousands of dollars loss."

"Shall we go to pick up the gold now?" eagerly asked Charley.

"No; have you forgotten poor Ivan Janova?"

"Pardon me, I did forget the boy exile."

"I am going to his rescue now."

"By all means, Mr. Wright."

"We can stop for the gold on our trip back."

"Vot's der course now?" asked Fritz, who was steering.

"Ivan Janova was sent by river to Tomsk, according to the detective's account," said Jack. "Thence he was forced to walk to his ultimate resting place in Yakutsk. The journey may occupy months. He was condemned to an ostrog, or general prison. It was once an old distillery or abandoned factory. There he will have to wear a convict's dress and have his head shaved; a ball and chain will be fastened to his ankle, and he may be beaten with the plete—a whip of twisted hide which is just as bad as the knout. His work will consist of brick making in the prison for several months,

after which he will be deported to a quicksilver mine to work in the deadly fumes that may eventually kill him. If he should be refractory, they will chain him to a wheelbarrow, which he will have to pull about wherever he goes."

"Where dot Yakutsk vos?" asked Fritz.

"Keep on to the east, to the Vilinisk Mountains. Its capital lies on the left bank of a branch of the Lena river at the end of that mountain range, in a valley formed by one side of the Amginsker Mountains. You can find its latitude on that chart. It is, I think, 62 degrees, 2 minutes, N. latitude and 129 degrees, 44 minutes E. longitude."

Fritz kept the machine going in the direction indicated.

On the following day Jack got at the prisoner again.

Peter Darinka was very obstinate.

He absolutely refused to talk about Ivan.

Nor would he consent to make a written confession.

"You may as well give up," said he, defiantly. "You will never get me to admit anything to you that would criminate me."

"Wait until we reach Yakutsk prison and I'll put the screws on you before a clergyman of the Greek Church and force you to unseal your lips," said Jack. "The affidavit of such a witness would convince the Czar of your guilt."

This threat made the man wince.

He knew it was true and that Jack could do it.

The country below the Rocket was assuming a wild aspect.

It was traversed by mountain chains and intersected by deep narrow valleys, with wild mountain streams flowing amidst great boulders and steep cliffs.

It was covered with dense forests amid which roamed a race called Tunguses, and wild yaks, the size of a small ox, covered with long hair roamed the highest parts of the mountains, finding their sustenance in the coarse, wirey grass growing there.

Summits and slopes alike were strewn with rock debris hidden under thick layers of lichens, larch, birch and poplars grew in profusion, amid which were seen few patches of grassy soil.

It was bitterly cold for our friends so high in the air, and the machine was therefore kept as near to the ground as possible.

When the air-ship reached the province of Yakutsk, our friends found that there was no region on earth where the extremes of cold or heat were so great as they encountered there.

Their heavy fur suits and the electric heaters barely sufficed to keep them warm, the Rocket became covered with hoar frost, and the metal became so intensely cold, they dared not touch it.

Notwithstanding the rigor of the climate, they saw many of the natives abroad, the Yakuts being particularly numerous.

They were middle-sized fellows, with narrow dark eyes, broad, flat noses, thick black hair, and no beards.

They lived in log *yurtas*, with small windows into which plates of ice or pieces of skin were inserted instead of panes of glass.

A large fire was kept burning continually in their huts, and the dwellings were grouped into villages called *naslegs*.

On the night the Rocket reached the vicinity of the Lena river, she was skimming along over the ground at a height of about fifteen feet from the level plain below.

Jack stood alone in the steering-room, and his friends were aft in the kitchen having their supper.

The parrot was roosted on top of the binnacle with his feathers all ruffled up, much as if he were asleep.

But suddenly he opened one of his beady red eyes, cocked his head on one side, and remarked solemnly:

"Cheese it, fellers, here comes a cop!"

Jack glanced at the bird, and saw that something had riveted its attention, and called forth that remark.

He therefore turned around to see what it was.

As he did so, he confronted Peter Darinka.

The prisoner had by some means got rid of his bonds, and gained possession of a pistol that hung on the wall.

Upon seeing that the parrot betrayed him, he leveled the weapon at Jack, and hissed in low tones:

"If you utter a word above a whisper I'll kill you!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE WAYSIDE PRISON.

THE young inventor did not lose courage for a moment, although he realized that the desperate man was liable to put a bullet through his head at any moment.

He undflinchingly faced Darinka, and asked in quiet tones:

"What do you want?"

"I intend to escape."

"Well?"

"Stop the machine."

"Certainly. You have the best of me."

And so saying, the inventor cut the electric current out of the wheel motor, and the speed of the Rocket gradually decreased.

Darinka retreated to the door, and muttered:

"If it wasn't for my fear of arousing your friends I'd shoot you!"

"The report of the pistol would bring them in here," replied Jack.

"I know that. Lower the air-ship nearer the ground."

"Are you going to jump off?"

"Yes, and if you arouse the rest and pursue me, I'll——"

"What!"

"Baffle you by blowing out my own brains."

A more desperate threat could not have been made, and it very clearly showed Jack what a terrible frame of mind Darinka was in.

The inventor let off some of the gas and the machine sunk lower.

"How does that suit you?" he asked.

"It will do. Remember what I told you!"

Jack nodded, and glancing sharply at the revolver in Darinka's hand, he saw that it was not loaded!

The villain did not realize this.

Jack then put full speed on the screws.

The Rocket shot ahead at a terrific pace, and the man not daring to leap off now for fear of breaking his neck, turned around savagely and sprang into the room.

"Why did you do that?" he asked.

"To prevent you from getting away," answered Jack.

"Dare you rebel?"

"Yes!"

"Beware!"

"I'm going to recapture you!"

"Then die!"

He aimed the pistol and pulled the trigger.

No report followed of course, and with one quick glance the man saw that there was not a cartridge in the weapon.

A fierce imprecation escaped him.

He hurled the useless weapon at Jack's head, and the inventor dodged it.

Darinka then rushed outside, yelling:

"I'll jump off, and kill myself anyway!"

"Not if I can stop you!" gasped Jack.

The man reached the deck but before he could carry out his desperate attempt at suicide, Jack seized him.

"Let me go!" he hissed furiously.

"Not much! Come back here."

"You shall not stop me."

"Oh, yes I shall."

The villain had a sample of Jack's enormous strength once before, but was scarcely prepared for what followed.

He made a reckless plunge from the flying Rocket, and just as his legs were leaving the deck, Jack stooped, seized him by the ankle and stopped him.

Holding the platform rail with one hand, Jack gave the man a jerk that landed him into the forward depression.

His head struck the metal plates with a resounding thump and it so dazed Darinka that he could not move.

Down jumped the inventor just as his friends, alarmed by the noise, came rushing from the kitchen.

"Bring me two pairs of handcuffs!" cried Jack.

Charley got them, and they secured the man's wrists and ankles so that he could not liberate himself.

When they returned to the cabin where he had been they saw that he must have rolled himself across the room to a table on which a tumbler stood, struck it, and knocked the glass down.

It had broken, and he had drawn his bonds over the sharp edges, severing them and regaining his liberty.

As soon as he was secured Jack returned to the wheel room.

He arrived there just in time to swing the wheel around and change the course of the machine, for it was plunging toward a mass of rock that towered up in her course.

"Bismarck," he muttered, as he eyed the parrot, "you are as good a watchman as any one would want. If you hadn't seen that rascal stealing up behind me I might have got killed."

A short time afterward Charley entered and relieved Jack of the wheel, and the inventor went on deck on lookout.

Far in the distance he caught view of an etape.

These buildings are prisons which afford temporary lodgings for prisoners on the line of march from Russia to Siberia.

It was the last one from St. Petersburg, and stood but one day's march from the Yakutsk penal station.

As Jack viewed it with his glass he observed that it was an old one storied building made of logs with moss stuffed in the chinks to keep out the raw wind.

A caravan of exiles had been resting there and were then coming out and getting into line to take up the march.

The officers who had command of them were furnished with a drosky—a sort of low, four-wheeled carriage without a top having a long narrow bench on which the passengers rode as if on a saddle with their feet reaching nearly to the ground.

It was drawn by three horses abreast with curved hoops rising high above their harness saddles to which bells were attached.

There were half a dozen officers in charge of the convicts, armed with pistols, and the drosky stood aside as yet unoccupied.

The unfortunate prisoners filed out with bowed heads and grief-stricken faces to finish the last stage of their long, weary journey, forever proscribed from their once happy homes.

The system of exiling prisoners from Russia to Siberia was principally done in order to force a population into the latter country which otherwise would be but little inhabited.

"Vot vas goin' on dere, Shack!" asked the Dutchman, whose attention was directed toward the etape by Jack's sharp scrutiny.

"We are nearing a convicts' stopping place," replied the inventor.

"Donner und blitzen! Vos dot so?"

"You can see for yourself. There are over two score of the felons and a half dozen soldiers guarding them."

"Where dey vos coom from vunct?"

"St. Petersburg, for this is the road from there!"

"Wos it tooken dem long to valk it?"

"That depends on how the roads are. We have seen that they are very bad with so much snow and ice. It therefore must have taken these poor fellows a month or two to get as far as this."

"Py shiminey, den dem must be der werry vuns vot ve vant."

"How do you mean?" asked Jack, in startled tones.

"Vy, aggordin' to dot long dime it tooked 'em ter valk so far, Ivan Janova must been mit dis growd."

"Sure enough!"

It was a startling conclusion.

Yet it was a very plausible theory.

Jack began to rapidly reckon it up.

"Vot you tink?" eagerly asked Fritz.

"I agree with you!" declared the inventor.

"Yer tink dot poy must be mit dem fellers?"

"So I reckon it, according to the time consumed."

"Den ve don't got ter gone so far as der brison fer him?"

"Not if he's among these unlucky wretches."

"Ve found oud puddy qwick now."

"I've got a plan."

"Vot it iss?"

"We will sail over them. If Ivan is among the crowd, I will go down on a ladder, cut his bonds, pick him up, and you can dart the Rocket up in the sky with us when I signal you."

"Dem soldiers vill been sure ter fire at yer."

"We must risk that and depend on our speed. If we should pause among them it would lead to a bloody fight in which many might get killed. Besides, all the rest of the convicts might get free. As some of them may deserve their fate, we mustn't allow that."

Jack's plan was a daring one.

As long as he was determined to try it, Fritz objected no more.

"Vell," he said, "it all debends how qwick der Rocket go up mit yer. Ter be sure, I vill took der vheel, und Dim und Charley could stood py der deck ter brodect yer mit der rifles alretty."

"Very well. Go and tell them about it."

Fritz hastened away, and Jack made his preparations.

By the time he had the rope ladder down and his knife in readiness, they were near enough to the prisoners for him to distinguish their features.

He carefully scanned them.

Finally he singled out a boyish figure.

It was Ivan!

The sight of him sent a thrill through the inventor, for if his plan proved to be successful he realized that he would not have to defy the authorities of the entire prison of Yakutsk.

By this time the Russians had caught sight of the flying machine, and were gazing at her in the profoundest astonishment.

Fritz had taken charge of the wheel, and Charley and Tim now came out armed with their repeating rifles.

"Do you understand the game?" asked Jack, in hurried tones.

"Ay, ay, my lad," replied the old sailor.

"Then stand by. We are almost up to them."

"I'll steady the ladder for you, sir," said Charley.

Jack clenched the knife between his teeth and went over the side.

Down the ladder he proceeded, and pausing at the bottom he saw that he was but five feet from the ground.

Along swept the Rocket under Fritz's skillful guidance, straight toward the spot where Ivan stood apart from the rest of the prisoners.

CHAPTER XIII.

BAFFLED BY A SHOT.

"IVAN JANOVA!"

The boy exile heard Jack and recognized him.

He started, turned pale, and an eager look flashed across his face.

"Jack Wright!" he muttered in joyful tones.

The poor fellow at once realized that the inventor was bent upon helping him, and it fired his blood and renewed his hope.

On went the Rocket, and Jack suddenly caught the last rung of the ladder at the back of his knees and hung head downward.

The moment he swept over Ivan, he seized the boy by the arm.

"Up, Fritz!" he screamed.

Holding the boy with one hand, Jack grasped the knife in the other and cut the rope binding Ivan's wrists.

"We are here to rescue you!" exclaimed Jack.

He released the young exile so he could help himself up the ladder to the deck of the Rocket.

Fritz heard him and caused the machine to dart up at an angle as fast as the gas was generated.

But the guards had immediately realized Jack's intention.

Several of them aimed their rifles at the daring inventor.

Bang! bang! bang! roared the weapons.

A sudden sting in Jack's arm followed.

One of the bullets had evidently struck him.

It numbed his arm for a moment, he lost all power in it, his grasp on Ivan relaxed and the young exile fell.

Down he went upon the drosky.

A loud yell escaped the soldiers and convicts when they saw Jack's hazardous plan frustrated.

For an instant Ivan was shocked by his fall, but he quickly recovered, bounded to his feet, seized the reins and whip, and started the three horses of the drosky off at a gallop.

Snap! crack! went the long, sinuous lash over the horses, the desperate boy's voice rang out, urging on the steeds, and in one minute he was going at a breakneck pace.

Every one was struck with amazement.

Nobody had expected this bold move on the part of the boy.

There was not another vehicle or horse for miles around.

The guards could not overtake the drosky either as they rushed after it, for the excited young fugitive had the horses galloping.

Seeing that the boy exile might escape, the yelling and swerving guards began to shoot after him.

Ivan crouched down behind the long seat, and the bullets whistled around him like a swarm of hornets.

Only two of the soldiers had time to fire at him, for the rest had to guard the convicts, whom they feared might try to escape.

In the meantime Jack observed Ivan's escape.

The young inventor's arm was wounded, and as he was in a dangerous position, hanging at the end of the swaying rope ladder, exposed to the shots of the soldiers, he got up.

Jack climbed back to the deck.

By the time he reached it the Rocket had risen 1,000 feet in the air, and was still ascending fast.

As his friends crowded around him, he exclaimed:

"I've failed!"

"Ach, yer vos shooded!"

"Yes—a slight wound in the arm."

"Blast 'em, will I heave 'em a shot?"

"No. Pursue the drosky and pick up Ivan!"

"Well," said Charley, consolingly, "if you did fail to lift the boy, you have liberated him, anyway."

"That's a grain of satisfaction."

Jack entered the cabin to dress his wound, and Fritz returned to the wheel-room and lowered the air-ship.

But by the time she got out of a cloud into which she had gone, the boy exile had disappeared.

Jack found that his wound was a slight one.

He passed up on deck, and saw the convicts and their guards proceeding along on their journey afoot.

"Any sign of Ivan, yet?" he asked Charley.

"No, sir. The last I saw of him he appeared to have escaped the bullets of the soldiers, and was going like the wind for yonder woods."

"Fritz, steer her for those trees and see if we can find him."

"Yah," the Dutchman replied, as he obeyed.

"Tim, you remain on lookout for him."

Jack then went below again.

The old sailor had a telescope.

He scanned the country below carefully.

"It'll be like huntin' fer a needle in a haystack," he remarked, "ter find ther lad among them ere trees."

"So I imagine," replied Charley.

And it was.

They went everywhere.

But saw nothing of the boy exile.

"I never saw a person so completely swallowed up as he seems to be!" exclaimed Charley, finally.

"Yer didn't?" replied Tim. "Waal, I did. Wuss nor that."

"It can't be possible!"

"Thar's whar yer wrong, my hearty. I once seen a lion eat a man. If that ain't bein' more swallered up nor Ivan is I don't know wot yer call it," chuckled Tim.

"Oh, you're joking now."

"No, I ain't. It came about werry natural. I'll tell yer how it wuz. Among ther crew o' ther ole frigate Wabash wuz a man wot got mad at me an' nigh broke my nose with a gun swab, jist 'cause I gave him a lickin' fer callin' me a liar. We wuz sworn enemies. Ther ship wuz cruisin' in ther South Pacific. One night, sir, I discovered as that 'ere sailor wuz a rebel spy. He wuz waitin' fer a chance ter blow up ther frigate. I accused him o' this, an' he got scared. We wuz passin' a islan'. He sprang overboard ter escape. I went arter him. He beat me ashore. Thar he hid in ther jungle. I follered a track I thought wuz his'n, an' it led me inter a canyon. Wall, sir, I hadn't got more'n half way inter ther pass, when all at onct wct d'yer suppose happened?"

"I couldn't guess to save my life!"

"A lion chased me."

"A lion on an island in the South Pacific?"

"That's wot I ses, my lad."

"How did it get there?"

"How does lions git anywheres?" indignantly asked Tim.

"Waal, sir, I wuzu't armed, so I runned fer my life up ther canyon, wi' ther lion arter me. Not ten steps ahead had I tacked when I seen ther dam o' a lake—at ther top o' ther canyon bust, an' towards me came a flood o' water wi' ther speed o' a clipper bark. Thar I wuz, a lion chasin' me, an' a flood rushin' towards me from ther opposite direction."

"Caught between two fires, as it were."

"Ay, ay! Then, ter make matters wuss, an army o' natives on top o' ther rocky cliffs on each quarter begun ter heave big rocks down towards my head, an' I tripped an' fell flat as a pancake. Ther lion was rushin' arter me from astern, ther flood wuz pourin' towards me from ahead, an' ther rocks wuz rainin' down from above. An awful earth-quake suddenly split a chasm in ther ground ahead, an' afore I could stop myself I reached ther edge, ther ground begun ter crumble away beneath me, an' I felt myself a fallin' down——"

"Well?" asked Charley, in amazement as Tim paused suddenly.

"Wot?" growled the old salt.

"How did you escape it all?"

Tim pondered very carefully.

In his enthusiasm he had worked himself into a number of very thrilling dangers, but how he was going to account for his escape was a matter that puzzled him very much.

A rather blank look gradually stole over his face, and he scratched his head, and coughed, and essayed to go on, but the task was too gigantic, so he finally blurted out:

"I'll leave yer ter imagine ther rest, my lad."

"But my imagination isn't equal to solving the puzzle, Tim."

"Waal, I don't think I'll tell yer any more about it fer ther present. I'll finish ther yarn some other time."

"That's a good way to get out of it."

"Awast thar! Who's tryin' ter?"

"Yon are. Yon couldn't explain if you tried."

"I could, but I don't want ter. 'Cause why? 'Cause I wanter leave yer in suspense, puzzlin' yer mind over how I escaped. That's whar I've got a joke on yer, Charley. Ha, ha, ha!"

With a look of supreme disgust on his face the young sailor turned away and muttered:

"The old liar ran himself into a corner and don't know any other way to get out of it excepting by evading an explanation."

And really that was about the truth of the matter.

The Rocket was driven in every direction until the next day in quest of the missing boy without Jack finding him.

When the shadows of twilight fell on the following evening Jack and the rest sat down to supper.

They had not been at the table long though, when they were startled by hearing a gun shot and a chorus of yells.

The flying machine was drifting in the air unguided at an altitude of about 300 feet, her propellers at rest.

Jack jumped up from the table and gasped:

"What's that?"

"Soun's like savages," replied Fritz.

Bang! Bang!

Bang! Bang! went four more shots.

Jack rushed up on deck and peered over the rail.

Below he observed a mountainous slope, down which a boy on horseback was dashing at full speed.

It only required one glance to show that he was Ivan Janova, and a troop of wild horsemen were pursuing him.

They were a band of Yakuts—the savages of that section of Siberia, and were mounted on long-haired ponies and reindeers as savage as themselves.

Attired in peculiar costumes of fur, and armed with rifles and native weapons, they were chasing the boy exile furiously.

CHAPTER XIV.

INTO THE MIRE.

THE gang of Yakuts in pursuit of Ivan were a thieving set who had made up their minds to rob him of the horse he bestrode and such valuables as he might have about his person.

Along they dashed at a furious pace, the boy clinging to the reins, and sticking to the back of his mount like a Centaur.

The Yakuts were all good riders.

But they were very bad marksmen.

Had they been better they would have shot Ivan.

The fugitive boy seemed to bear a charmed life, for none of the whistling bullets touched him, although they flew pretty close to him.

It was an exciting race as they thundered down the hillside, and the moment Jack saw them he called up his friends.

"There's Ivan now!" he shouted.

"Where? Where?" eagerly asked the rest.

"Being chased by a horde of Yakuts."

"Vot dey vos after him for?"

"I'm blest if I know."

"B'ar down on 'em!" roared Tim.

"I'll take the wheel!" cried Charley, hastening to the pilot-house.

A moment later the Rocket shot away in pursuit of the Yakuts, and Charley let off some of the gas to lower her.

She gradually settled down, and gained her equilibrium at a height of fifty feet from the ground.

She was then going at the rate of sixty miles an hour, and the young sailor put his hand on the dynamo lever, to slacken her speed, when to his alarm, he found that the lever worked back and forth on its pivot without acting.

That something was wrong with the machinery was very evident, for he could neither stop her now nor increase her speed.

Alarmed, he shouted for Jack.

"Stop her!" cried the inventor. "You are passing them!"

"I can't," replied Charley. "Come in here—quick!"

Startled by his declaration, Jack hastened into the wheel-room, and Charley explained about the lever.

Jack looked dismayed.

He tried it and found that Charley told the truth.

"There must be something wrong with the machinery,"

said the young inventor. "I'll go down and see what it is."

"Isn't there any other way to stop her?" asked the sailor.

"No, this lever controls the dynamo and there's no way of getting at the leads from the generator to the motors, or I would disconnect the wires."

"Shack!" yelled Fritz from the deck. "Should ve fire at dem Yakuts? Dey almos' vos ub by de poy!"

"Yes, yes! Prevent them from catching him if you can."

The Dutchman and the old sailor began to fire.

They had no time to waste for the Rocket was swiftly leaving the natives and the young fugitive behind.

Jack hastened to the trap leading into the hold.

It had been left standing open by Fritz a short time before as he had been down below oiling the machinery.

As Jack crept in he saw a small figure come flying toward him.

It was Whiskers.

The moment Jack saw him, a suspicion of the truth flashed across his mind, and as the monkey rushed through the trap, Jack muttered:

"I'll bet he is the cause of this mishap!"

He felt certain that the monkey had been up to mischief.

Creeping up forward to where the wires joined the bottom of the dynamo-lever, which came through the floor, Jack examined it.

One of the springs was gone.

A metal pin had held it to the end of the lever.

This had been withdrawn, probably by the monkey.

The controlling wire had then slipped into the metal box containing the dynamo, which could only be opened by unbolting it.

Jack could not find the pin or the spring.

He had duplicates in his tool chest, however, and saw that he would lose much valuable time opening the dynamo box to make the connection again.

Unless he did so though, the propellers could not be stopped.

He therefore hastened to get out.

When he reached the kitchen, he shouted to Charley:

"Where are we now?"

"Several miles ahead of them, sir."

"How does it look outside?"

"The Lena river is flowing dead ahead."

"Couldn't you have circled around above the Yakuts?"

"No; couldn't see them, sir."

"Why not?" asked Jack, impatiently.

"Because the boy plunged into the forest."

"Oh, I see! Drop her in the river. That will retard her."

"Very well, sir. How do you want her steered then?"

"Go down the stream."

Jack procured a pin, a spring, and a wrench.

With these things he returned to the hold to repair the damage.

Charley let out the rest of the gas, and the Rocket shot down into the river.

She struck with a great splash.

Her bow was driven under, but she recoiled, and riding on a level keel, she shot along on the stream.

It was a wide sheet of water with considerable ice upon it, and the propellers drove the air-ship along swiftly.

The young sailor shouted the news to Tim and Fritz, and the fat fellow hastened below to lend Jack his aid.

Tim took a chew of plug, and remained on watch.

Far ahead he noticed a white streak stretching across the stream, and shouted down to Charley:

"Wot's that ahead on ther river?"

"I can't make it out," replied the young sailor.

Tim scanned it again, and then suddenly cried:

"By thunder, it's a fall!"

"A fall!" gasped Charley, in alarm.

"Don't yer hear ther rumblin' o' ther water?"

"Yes, yes! What shall I do?"

"Bein' as ye can't haul her to, who don't yer come about?"

"That's so. What a fool I was not to think of it."

He swung around the wheel.

The Rocket slowly turned and breasted the strong current, but she was unable to contend against it, as her propellers were not made for water propulsion, and Charley shouted:

"It don't do any good, Tim!"

"We're bein' pulled ter ther fall by ther current I see."

"Yes; I'll head her for the shore."

"Can't yer git up gas in time ter raise her?"

"I'll fix the wheel and try."

He turned the prow of the machine toward the left embankment and then got at the gas tank.

At the same time he shouted the news to Jack and Fritz.

Thrusting in some chemicals, Charley closed the tank door and peered out the window ahead.

The Rocket was crossing the river at an angle, the strong current kept pulling her toward the edge of the cataract, and it became clear that she could not escape a plunge.

Indeed, a few moments afterward she reached the edge of the fall, where the water was boiling and hissing in foam.

Half the distance to the shore had been gained.

But she did not travel fast enough.

She shot the fall.

As she flew through the air a cry of alarm escaped Charley, for he saw at the base of the cataract a jagged mass of rocks protruding from the bottom around which the water was foaming.

To land upon them was certain destruction, for the fall was over thirty feet in height, and they were bound to land heavily.

But fortunately the driving wheels fanned the air, and they carried the machine far beyond the spot to which she would have ordinarily fallen had not the wheels propelled her.

She landed in deep water with a fearful splash.

The old sailor had gripped the rail tightly to prepare for the shock, but he was hurled into the river as the Rocket sunk.

She came up again almost instantly, and continued her mad career, while the old sailor, chilled to the bone by the freezing water, struck out for the nearest shore, yelling:

"Help! help! Man overboard!"

Tim reached the shore in safety.

But the Rocket rushed ahead.

It was impossible for her to go against the swift current of boiling water that came down over the fall.

Therefore, Tim was left behind, and went stumping along the embankment after the fast-going boat.

"Haul to thar!" he yelled. "Haul to! Come about! Veer aroun', gol darn ye! D'yer wanten leave me astarn?"

Charley did not hear him.

His mind was too much taken up with managing the boat.

Tim was wild with vexation.

Chilled by the water and half frozen by the cold air, the old sailor scudded along the bank of the river at a rapid gait.

He was so intent upon watching the boat that he scarcely noticed the ground ahead.

The result was that he plunged into one of the terrible marshes that are common to that region.

A roar of alarm escaped him as the frozen crust of ground broke beneath his weight, and he sunk in the soft mire beneath.

To Tim's alarm he soon discovered that the treacherous, tenacious mud was as bad as a bed of quicksand.

He continued to sink in it.

It was clear that if he did not receive help soon he would be totally swallowed up by the foul odored mire.

He struggled desperately to get out.

But it was useless.

It held him like a vise.

Then he began to yell for help.

But the crew of the Rocket were so far away they failed to hear his voice.

CHAPTER XV.

ESCAPE OF THE PARROT.

THE shadows of twilight had gradually merged into the gloom of night, before Jack and Fritz had the dynamo lever repaired, which the inventor imagined Whiskers had deranged.

They crept out of the hold of the Rocket.

When they shot the fall, the shock had shaken them up, but they had not suffered any particular injury.

"Charley Woods can stop the propellers now," said Jack, "and we can get up out of the Lena, and go back to the forest into which Ivan rode on one of the drosky horses, chased by the Yakuts."

"Yah!" replied Fritz. "Let's do dot."

"Where's Tim?"

"Ub on vatch," replied Fritz, who did not know that the plunge over the fall had hurled the sailor overboard.

Indeed, they did not suspect that at that moment the old marine had plunged into the marsh on shore, and was sinking in the mud at the risk of his life.

As they passed from the kitchen to the cabin, they saw Darinka with the manacles on his wrists and ankles lying on the floor glaring at them like a wild beast.

It was bitterly cold.

As they entered the wheel room, Charley exclaimed:

"We cleared the cataract, but we are going down stream like fury!"

"The propeller lever is in good order now," said Jack.

"Good! We'll get out of the river as soon as possible, then."

"Yes; I'll call Tim down," said Jack.

He went to the door and glanced up at the deck, but failed to see anything of the old sailor.

Surprised at this, Jack ascended and glanced around.

"Gone!" he muttered blankly. "Where can he be?"

He was sure Tim was not down below, and it then occurred to him that some accident had befallen the old sailor.

"Charley, come about, and retrace your course," he shouted.

"Ay, sir! Has anything happened?"

"Tim has disappeared."

The Dutchman and sailor were alarmed to hear this news. Around went the boat, and she ran back slowly, Jack remaining out on deck watching the shore and water.

She had not gone far before Jack heard Tim's voice.

"Help!" the old sailor was shouting.

In a few moments the inventor located the sound as coming from the shore on the starboard side.

He called to Charley to run close to the embankment.

This was done, and as soon as they arrived opposite the marsh, and Jack heard Tim's voice coming from the midst of it, he cried:

"Stop her, Charley—he's around here somewhere!"

The sailor complied.

Jack could not see Tim.

The old fellow was then sunk to his neck.

He could see the flying machine very clearly.

"Jack aboy!" he yelled, frantically.

"Hullo! Where are you?" replied the inventor.

"Sunk in this ere swamp?"

"Thunder! Charley, run her ashore."

"Ay, ay," replied Woods, complying.

"Hurry, lads," roared Tim. "Hurry, or I'll go under."

As soon as the Rocket's bow touched the shore, Jack sprang into the shallow water, and waded up the embankment.

The moment he arrived beside the swamp he saw Tim's head, for the old sailor kept on yelling to attract his attention.

"How in the world did you tumble in there?" demanded the inventor.

"Ther top wuz frozen an' broke in wi' me," groaned Tim.

"Hey, Fritz!"

"Yah!"

"Come ashore with a rope!"

The Dutchman carried out this order.

Jack made a noose in the end of the line.

Flinging it to Tim, he exclaimed:

"Get that under your arms if you can."

"Yer'll ha' ter pull me out a bit fust," answered the marine.

He grasped the line with both hands, and Jack and Fritz pulled on the other end with all their might.

The mire clung tenaciously to the old seaman's body, but they slowly drew him up until his shoulders were out.

He then got the noose around his body, under his arms, and they tugged and hauled until finally they got him ashore.

Tim was plastered with mud from head to foot.

As soon as he recovered from his exhaustion, he told his friends how he happened to get there.

He then washed himself in the river.

This done, the trio returned aboard the Rocket.

When they had changed their clothing, the machine was sent up in the air, and returned to the woods where Ivan was last seen.

There Jack spent two days searching for the boy.

He was not found, however.

In the meantime, the soldiers had reached the prison with the other convicts, and having locked up the exiles, they gained reinforcements, and returned to hunt for Ivan.

Jack had begun to despair of finding the boy.

"It looks as if the Yakuts had made away with Ivan," said he to his companions. "We may as well leave here."

"Where next we could look?" asked Fritz in glum tones.

"Anywhere. To define his location is impossible. I was in hope of rescuing the boy. That expectation is now gone."

"Vell, if ve de camp ohf dot Yakuts could foundt," said Fritz, "ve mebbe would discofered dot poy dere."

"If he isn't dead," interposed Jack.

"You tink dey would killed him?"

"Perhaps. They are a lawless gang."

"Thar's no use hopin' fer too much," said Tim, as he took a mouthful of tobacco. "I've given up expectin' ter find ther lad."

"Well, I won't leave this section of the country until I do find him, or discover what his fate is," said Jack, firmly.

"This is a pretty state of uncertainty we are in," said Charley.

Just then Bismarck and Whiskers came racing into the cabin where the foregoing dialogue occurred that afternoon.

They were fighting furiously.

The monkey was mad, for the parrot had caught him asleep, and nipped a piece out of the end of his tail.

Around the cabin they raced, the parrot in the lead, and the monkey hopping along after him, chattering and scolding, and anxiously trying to get a chance to pulverize the parrot.

"A fight!" chuckled Tim.

"Run, Bismarck!" roared the Dutchman.

"Go fer him, Whiskers!"

"Shiminey Christmas, if der monkey hit him I push his face oud!"

Tim stumped after the racers, and Fritz galloped after the sailor.

They made several laps around the cabin, and then the parrot spied the open door and flew up on deck.

After him hopped the monkey.

No sooner did Bismarck reach the deck, when the notion occurred to him to fly to the ground to escape the angry monkey.

He sailed up on the railing.

Just as Whiskers reached out for him Bismarck gave an ear-splitting yell of defiance, and launched himself from the Rocket.

Down through the air he fluttered, and the monkey paused on the rail, never daring to follow the bird.

The Rocket was about one hundred feet from the ground, and a shout of alarm escaped Fritz when he saw what the bird did.

"Lower der Rockets!" he roared. "Ve lose me dot perd alretty."

Charley promptly let the air-ship down.

There was a piece of timber land close by toward which the parrot rushed, and Tim seized the monkey so it could not follow, and thrust Whiskers in his cage.

Fritz alighted and chased the bird.

The parrot dodged him very cleverly, and led him such a chase that Fritz had to call his companions to aid him capture Bismarck.

In a few minutes the entire crew of the air ship were in hot pursuit of the bird, and they finally ran the mischievous parrot into a bush where he became so hopelessly entangled that Fritz caught him.

"You'd better clip one of his wings," said Jack, as they started back for the Rocket. "It won't do to have him play that trick very often."

"I vill keeb der son-of-a-sea-gook by his cage!" declared Fritz.

"Get out!" croaked the parrot.

"I believe he understands your threat!" laughed Charley.

"No sich thing," assented Tim. "That ere bird don't know nuthin' 'cept wot he's taught, an' blast my timbers if —"

"Good heavens!" interrupted Jack, excitedly. "See there!"

"Soldiers in possession of the air ship!" gasped Charley.

"Mein cracious, und dey haf setted Peter Dariinka free!"

"It's ther guards wot had Ivan," added Tim.

The quartette paused on the edge of the woods.

A dozen Russian soldiers were swarming around the Rocket.

They were the men who had come from the Yakutsk prison, and had taken the shackles off Dariinka.

As they caught view of Jack and the rest they aimed their rifles at them, and the lieutenant in command shouted sternly:

"Hands up and surrender, or I'll order my men to fire!"

"Rats!" roared Fritz, and he rushed away.

The rest thought better of the matter, for Jack said:

"Obey, or they will murder us. We have no weapons here."

Charley and Tim raised their hands.

The lieutenant advanced.

"You give in?" he asked.

"We do," replied Jack.

"March this way!"

"Forward, boys."

And the three strode toward the soldiers.

As soon as they reached the guards the lieutenant exclaimed:

"Bind them!"

The soldiers tied our friends' hands behind their backs.

CHAPTER XVI.

CAUGHT IN THE SKY.

"GENTLEMEN, I would shoot them where they stand!" exclaimed Dariinka. "You all know I am one of the secret police of St. Petersburg, and therefore can realize that I would not say this unless I knew that I was correct."

"But, sir, we have no right," began the lieutenant.

"Humbug!" interrupted Dariinka, impatiently. "Might is right in this case. This man and his friends deliberately liberated one of the exiles whom you were conducting to the mines. According to our law that crime is punishable by death."

"True, sir, but they had better be brought to the prison and undergo trial for their offense."

"I say no! You'll regret it if you do!"

"Who commands here, Mr. Darinka—you or I?"

"That don't make a particle of difference! These Americans are desperate adventurers, and will cause you no end of annoyance if you fail to do as I suggest."

"I shall do nothing of the kind!"

"Very well."

There was an ugly look of disappointment upon the dark face of the villain when he saw that he could not prevail upon the lieutenant to kill Jack, Tim and Charley at once.

He scowled at the prisoners, and Jack laughed in his face.

"Your vile plan to kill us so as to protect yourself didn't work, did it?" laughed the young inventor.

"Oh, your lease of life will be short anyway."

"We won't go under through your dirty work, though."

"No quarreling there!" sharply cried the lieutenant.

"What are you going to do with that flying machine?" asked Darinka.

"Leave it where it is," the lieutenant answered.

"Nonsense! You ought to confiscate it."

"How can we carry that big object?"

"Why—ride in it."

"But I can't work the machine."

"Can't you make the prisoners work it for you?"

"It might fall with us."

"There's no danger of that. I've ridden in it several days, thousands of feet up in the air. It's a wonderful contrivance, and just as safe to ride in as a carriage."

"Our search for Ivan Janova would be greatly facilitated if we could use the machine as you say."

"Try it. You can then very quickly decide upon its merits."

"Will you consent to operate it for us?" the lieutenant asked Jack.

"Certainly," replied the inventor.

"Very well. We will ride in it. Do not let it go up very high though. If you run down Janova, I will make your sentence lighter when we reach the prison."

"That's a bargain," said Jack, assuming an air of delight. Every one got aboard.

"Are yer goin' ter do wot they ses?" asked Tim in surprise.

"Yes," replied Jack, "and before we come down I'll have them all at my mercy, and regain the Rocket."

"How?" eagerly asked the old sailor.

"You'll see. Look out! They are watching us! Some one may understand English! We must be guarded!"

"No conversation there!" exclaimed the lieutenant.

"Can I have one of my friends to help me?" asked Jack.

"He can work her unaided!" growled Darinka. "Don't you let him have a man of his crew, lieutenant, or he'll play a trick on us. Probably when he spoke in English just now he may have laid a scheme."

"If you will mind your own business," exclaimed Jack, flashing an angry look at the vicious rascal, "I'll be very much obliged to you! Do you hear?"

"You must work her alone," said the lieutenant, suspiciously. "Should you require aid we will help you. Neither of your companions can have his bonds off."

"Just as you please."

"Where's the Dutchman?" asked Darinka.

"Ran away," replied the lieutenant.

"Confound him! I thought we had all of them!"

"We may catch him yet. Stow the two prisoners in that closet!"

Darinka seized the knob of the closet door, and tried to get in, but the door seemed to be securely fastened.

Jack was surprised at this, for when they left the air-ship, he had left that door slightly ajar.

He did not say anything about it, though.

"Can't open it," said Darinka, in disgust.

"Never mind. Put them in the next room."

This was done, and Jack said to the officer:

"If you expect me to manage this machine, you will have to loosen my hands."

"Very good. But recollect, sir, that if you attempt any treachery, I shall not hesitate to shoot you!"

"I am unarmed."

The lieutenant thereupon unfastened Jack's bonds, and said:

"Now, send her up a short distance, and drive her about in different directions, so that we can look for Janova."

He drew his revolver as he spoke, and held it in readiness to fire upon the first alarm.

Jack smiled grimly.

He then began to generate an enormous quantity of gas.

Darinka came in and said:

"Your men are guarding the prisoners, lieutenant."

"Send one of them on deck to keep a lookout."

"I will attend to that duty myself. Loan me a pistol."

"I have a brace—take one."

The villain seized the weapon eagerly, for he made up his mind to shoot Ivan without warning the moment he saw him.

Leaving the room he ascended to the deck.

There he posted himself on the platform.

In a few moments the gas was generated, and the air-ship began to swiftly ascend into the sky.

Up, up she shot with increasing speed.

In a few moments she was several hundred feet above the ground, and the lieutenant exclaimed sharply:

"That is high enough!"

"I can't stop her!" said Jack.

"What?" gasped the other, in dismay.

"She's got to go up till she reaches her equilibrium."

"How much higher will that be?"

"That I cannot say. Wait and you'll see."

The Rocket continued to ascend swiftly.

In a few minutes she was up a thousand feet.

But there was no cessation to her ascent.

She continued to mount higher.

Two thousand feet was reached and her speed did not diminish.

"Say! Stop her, I say!" cried the lieutenant, losing patience.

"It is impossible, sir!" coolly replied Jack.

"Can't you let off power?"

"No," said Jack.

"You are deceiving me!"

"Well!"

The lieutenant turned pale.

He thought he was in great peril.

"I was a fool to follow Darinka's advice," he muttered.

He then aimed his revolver at Jack's head, and added:

"If you do not instantly descend I will blow your brains out."

"Should you kill me," Jack answered quietly, "you would never be able to bring the machine down to earth again."

"Your companions would manage her."

"No; they would not."

The lieutenant became more uneasy than ever upon hearing this, and said in tones of bitter reproach.

"You have duped us."

"That's true!" Jack agreed.

"Why have you done so?"

"To regain my liberty of course."

"Then I'll kill you and work the machinery myself."

"Just try it and see how impossible it will be."

Jack stepped aside, and the lieutenant grasped the levers. The first one he pulled started the wheels revolving at a furious pace and the Rocket darted ahead.

He turned one of the gas cocks, and a stream of the noxious fumes flew out in his face, almost smothering him before he could shut it off again.

A cry of alarm escaped him and he recoiled.

"Merciful Heaven!" he groaned, "I can't do anything with her!"

"That's just what I told you," answered Jack grimly.

Just then Darinka came rushing in excitedly.

"Where are you taking us?" he roared.
 "To a place you'll never reach."
 "Where is that?"
 "Heaven."
 "What's the trouble here, lieutenant?"
 He was informed.
 It frightened him very much.
 "Can't you work her?" piteously asked the officer.
 "No, I can't. I won't attempt it, for fear of making matters worse."
 "We are three thousand feet up now," said Jack, eying the barometer.
 "And our speed is not abated," groaned the lieutenant.
 A deep silence ensued.
 It was getting awfully cold.
 The Rocket plunged into the clouds.
 Finally Jack said:
 "Gentlemen, there is only one way to save your lives."
 "How do you mean?" eagerly asked the lieutenant.
 "You must all become my prisoners; unless you surrender yourselves, I'll let her go on ascending. I may as well perish in the sky as to submit to going to prison to die."
 A feeling of intense horror overwhelmed the two men, for they knew that they were entirely at Jack's mercy.

CHAPTER XVII.

REVERSING THE SITUATION.

A THICK hoar frost had covered the windows by the time Jack finished speaking, the breath of the three could be seen like smoke, and a sharp cracking and snapping sounded all over the Rocket.

The barometer showed a height of 4,000 feet presently, and a gray gloom filled the interior, from a second cloud they ran into.

A deathly silence ensued.

The lieutenant finally asked in hoarse tones:

"Can't we compromise?"

"Yes," replied Jack. "I am ready."

"If we submit, what will you do to us?"

"Make prisoners of all hands first."

"And then?" asked the lieutenant.

"Release your soldiers when we reach the ground."

"You to retain your freedom and this machine?"

"Exactly. I don't owe you any personal spite."

"But how about me?" growled Peter Darinka.

"You I'll keep."

"Then I won't submit!"

"My conditions are that the soldiers secure you again."

A blank look of dismay mantled the villain's face, and he glanced at the lieutenant, who just then aimed a pistol at him.

"Our lives," said the officer "are at stake. They are collectively far more valuable than your individual life, Darinka. I am, therefore, going to give it to Mr. Wright."

"By heavens, I won't then!" hissed Darinka.

"If you don't I'll shoot you!"

"Two can play at that game, lieutenant," cried Darinka, and he aimed the borrowed pistol at the officer.

"What! dare you raise a weapon against me?"

"Of course. You are going to sacrifice me to save yourself."

"I am about to follow the wisest course."

"Why don't you kill Wright and try to manage the Rocket?"

"I've already tried and failed."

"Then let me try."

"No; you might endanger our lives more than I did."

"Obstinate fool! I will——"

"Surrender now!"

"Never!"

Bang!

Bang!

Both fired.

Darinka fell wounded.

The lieutenant had a flesh wound too.

But he was a plucky fellow and uttered no complaint.

Rushing over to the prostrate man, he quickly disarmed and bound him, and the soldiers rushed in.

They had been alarmed by the pistol shots.

In a few words the lieutenant explained the situation to them, and although they did not like it, they saw that their leader's plan was the wisest one after all.

Consequently they agreed to do as he ordered.

"Lay all your arms in the corner," said Jack.

The soldiers obeyed.

Scarcely was this done when the closet door flew open, and to the astonishment of every one Fritz emerged.

When he ran away he made a detour, got aboard the Rocket unseen, and locked himself in the closet.

He now grasped a rifle.

Covering the soldiers with it, he cried:

"Pully fer us! Ve own dem now, Shack!"

"Fritz, by all that's sacred!" ejaculated the inventor.

"Yah, I dell you apoud id py und py. Secure dem, Shack."

While Fritz guarded the soldiers with the rifle, Jack tied every one of them, and then ran to the cabin and released his friends.

They were overjoyed at the news.

Following Jack back to the wheel room, they saw for themselves how the situation stood.

The barometer now indicated over five thousand feet altitude.

Jack then pulled the valve lever to let off the gas, so they would descend, but could not budge them.

A pang of alarm passed over him.

"By thunder!" he ejaculated, "there's something the matter with the valves. They won't open. We will keep mounting higher and higher the longer they remain shut."

"How kin ye examine 'em?" anxiously asked Tim.

"They are, as you know, under the hull. To reach them I will have to swing down on a rope. Come and help me, Charley!"

He rushed out as he spoke.

Getting a rope, he went up on deck.

Here he instructed Charley how to act.

Jack then made a slip noose in the rope, and fastening it to his body, he got down under the flying machine, whereupon he quickly saw that the valves were frozen shut in a casing of ice.

It was formed of the frozen moisture that ran down the hull and gathered upon the valve.

To get the valve open he would have to break the ice away.

"Bring me an ax!" he shouted to Charley.

"Do you see the cause of the trouble?" asked the sailor.

"Oh, yes. The valves are covered with ice."

"No wonder they wouldn't open."

The young sailor procured an ax and let it down with a line.

Jack then set to work breaking away the ice, and finally released the casing when the valve flew open.

This was due to the lever in the wheel room being thrown over.

Out poured a heavy volume of gas in Jack's face before he could get out of the way.

"Charley!" he gasped, chokingly. "Hoist me up."

He tried to avoid the fumes by holding his breath.

It was almost a useless attempt, and his brain began to reel and he felt his senses deserting him.

Then all consciousness fled.

Fortunately Charley heard him.

He hoisted Jack up to the deck and there the young inventor presently recovered and found the machine rapidly descending.

Jack felt sick for a short time afterward, but finally got over it and said to Charley:

"I tried hard to avoid the fumes, but wasn't able to stand it."

"Ain't we going down pretty fast, sir?"

"Yes, the valves are wide open."

They then went into the cabin and thence to the wheel-room, where Jack shut the valves partially to decrease their speed.

All hands were very glad when they reached the ground, for the coldness in the upper regions was many degrees below zero.

As soon as they landed the lieutenant asked Jack:

"Do you intend to keep faith with me now?"

"I do most decidedly," answered the young inventor. "I have found you to be an honorable officer. But before I let you go I want you to witness a confession I am going to wring from Darinka to the effect that Ivan Janova is an innocent victim of this man's rascally plotting."

"What! can you do that?" asked the officer, in surprise.

"Yes!" emphatically answered Jack. "You cannot fail to believe the evidence of your own eyesight."

"That's a fact, sir; and if you can do that to my entire satisfaction I shall abandon my hunt for the boy."

"Let us make the effort then," said Jack.

He thereupon walked into the cabin, to the floor of which the chairs were screwed that surrounded the dining table.

Jack then put a pen, a bottle of ink and a sheet of paper upon a table before one of the chairs.

He then turned to his friends and said:

"Carry Darinka in here, and bind him securely in that chair, leaving his arms free to write."

While this was being done Jack procured some insulated wire and made a lead with it from the dynamo to the cabin, where he secured the wire to the chair Darinka was fastened in.

"Tim," said the inventor. "You station yourself in the wheel-room and turn the dynamo lever according to my instructions."

"Ay, ay, lad, but why didn't yer do this in ther pilot house?"

"Simply because there is no place there to write. Send the Russian soldiers in here, to witness the ordeal."

Tim saluted and stumped away.

When he was gone, Jack bared the ends of the wires, and loosening Darinka's hand bonds, he twisted one of the wires around his left wrist.

He then bared the man's left ankle and secured the other wire to it.

The villain watched these proceedings curiously, and the soldiers filed into the room, and eyed Jack's preparations.

"What are you doing this for?" growled the prisoner uneasily.

"I intend to force a confession from you," replied Jack.

"Force, eh? You'll force nothing from me."

"Darinka, I know you are a desperate man. You are a liar and a scoundrel. No satisfaction can be gained from you by fair means. I therefore intend to use force."

"Ivan Janova told me the whole history of your attempt to put him out of the way so that you could inherit the title and estates to which he is the rightful heir. A detective I employed learned all that occurred after you abducted the boy and carried him to Russia. In order to vindicate the boy, and expose your own rascality in full, I now demand of you a written confession of everything. If you will give it you will escape the most frightful torture. Refuse and I shall turn a current of electricity into your body that will make you think you are in the infernal regions, and will force you to do as I say."

"I have no confession to make."

"Then you refuse my fair offer?"

"I won't do a cursed thing you say."

"Remember—this is your last chance."

"Do your worst—I defy you."

"Very well, sir. Hey, Tim!"

"Ay, ay!"

"Turn on 110 volts!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

VINDICATED AT LAST.

An expectant look swept over Peter Darinka's dark face, for he had no idea of what was coming.

Electricity to him was an unknown element.

But he was not long kept in doubt about the matter, as his body was in circuit with the dynamo.

A prickly sensation ran through his nerves.

It was almost instantly followed by a sudden wave that gave him a shock which made him stiffen out rigidly.

Every muscle in his body was contracted.

Millions of waves of red hot needles seemed to shoot through him from his heels to his head.

The spectators gazed on curiously.

A sudden strain came upon the bonds that held the man, and they crackled, the chair snapped and the cords sunk deeply in his flesh.

Only for an instant the man remained thus.

The spectators saw his face become distorted; his eyes, wild and fiery, bulged out from their sockets and the hair on his head stood on end while every muscle began to pulsate.

A terrible yell burst from his mouth.

He fixed his horrible glance on Jack.

The young inventor scanned him keenly.

"He can stand four times as much more current without dying, gentlemen," remarked the inventor in the Russian language.

"Stop it!" screamed Darinka.

"Off, Tim!"

"Ay, ay!"

Like magic the current ceased.

A refreshed feeling took possession of Darinka.

He felt as if he had taken a bath.

For a moment his muscles were fixed; then they relaxed.

He felt like himself again.

"That," said Jack, "is a mild sample of what you are to get in case you still persist in refusing to do as I tell you."

"You may kill me, but I won't obey you!" said Darinka, fiercely.

"You are foolish. You might spare yourself by submitting. Your obstinate will cannot withstand a continuous current. If you let it fly through you again, it shall stay until you do. Now I ask you again—will you do as I demand?"

"No!"

"Tim, 220 volts!"

"Ay, ay."

And the current came.

If Darinka had not been fastened to his chair, the strength of the current might have knocked him over.

A prolonged yell of intense agony escaped him, he became doubled up, and he remained so cramped that he could not budge.

Then he burst into a fierce torrent of oaths and abuse.

There was no cessation of the current this time, and as the wretch found no relief, he began to weaken.

Finally his courage forsook him entirely.

He became panic stricken.

"Mercy!" he howled.

"Not until you obey me," sternly replied Jack.

"I'll die! I know I will."

"That makes little difference to me."

The man raved like a maniac for awhile, but although Jack was very much averse to torturing even an enemy in this barbarous fashion, he did not relent.

He knew there was no other way to break the brute's obstinate will, and as the cause justified the deed, he let the villain suffer.

Finally Darinka screamed:

"I'll obey! Stop it, for pity's sake!"

"You will write the confession of all your crimes without reserve!"

"I will! Oh, I can't stand this misery any longer!"
 "Should you fail the current will be doubled again next time."

"I tell you I'll obey!"

"Off, Tim!"

"Ay, ay!"

The moment the current ceased, Darinka gasped:

"Thank God!"

All his misery departed instantly.

He grasped the wire bound to his left wrist and tried to break it off, but the soft, yielding copper did not part.

Then he glared around at Jack like a wild beast.

For a moment, now that he was relieved of the current, he felt like revolting again, as it cut his pride to have to give in after his boastful remarks.

But a recollection of that awful element recurred to his mind, and he shuddered and let go the wire.

Jack pointed at the materials on the table.

"Write!" he exclaimed.

"What shall I say?" groaned the rascal, picking up the pen.

"I will not dictate. All I want is a full confession."

"But I don't know how to write——"

"Hey, Tim!"

"Ay, ay!"

"No!" yelled Darinka, frantically. "No more, no more!"

"Do as I told you, then!"

"Yes, yes—anything! Anything but that!"

And he, with feverish haste, began to write a confession.

It occupied a short time to finish it, and when he finally flung down the pen, he seemed to be inclined to tear up the paper.

Jack snatched it away.

He read it aloud.

The paper contained a full confession.

It told all of his villainy which has been set forth in these pages.

The paper vindicated Ivan Janova, and it placed the writer under the liability of a death sentence from the Czar.

When Jack finished reading it, he said to the lieutenant:

"What do you think of this?"

"I think that man is a villain."

"You now see I am justified?"

"Yes, sir. Henceforth my hunt for Ivan Janova ceases."

"Will you verify this confession with your signature?"

"Gladly, and so shall all my men attest to it as witnesses."

They thereupon signed the confession as fast as they were liberated, and their arms were restored to them.

After some conversation they took their departure, asserting that they were going back to the prison.

Jack then put heavy irons on Peter Darinka and he was returned to his former place, cowed, sullen and despairing.

Our friends raised the Rocket to a height of one hundred feet, divided the watch and then turned in.

On the following morning Tim went out on deck to take a view of the rocky country they then hovered over.

He had not been there long before Charley made his appearance.

"Well, Tim, any sign of the boy exile yet?" he asked, cheerily.

"No, lad, an' wot's more, we're in a mighty bleak place, too."

"I'm afraid we will not find the boy again."

"Git out! Wot are yer sayin' that fer? Sometimes when yer jist sartin yer goin' ter fail that's ther werry time yer succeeds, as I knows."

"Have you ever been brought to that pitch?"

"Waal, I reckon I hev. When? Why, when I wuz in ther navy. How did it happen? I'll tell yer."

"Is this a yarn?"

"No, a true story."

"Let's hear it then."

"Werry good. Listen. About fifty year ago thar wuz a

gang o' sea scourges in ther North Atlantic wot terrorized ther merchant marine o' all countries. We wuz sent ter wipe 'em out——"

"Hold on a moment, Tim! Are you as old as me?"

"Me! Why, bless yer heart, you're only a boy ter me."

"Why, how old are you, Tim?"

"Forty-nine, my lad."

"Then you went hunting the seas for this scourge just one year before you were born, did you?"

"Why—why—why——" blustered Tim.

"You said it happened fifty years ago."

"Did I? Waal, now I come ter think of it, I oughter said fifteen years ago. That wuz a ship o' ther gabbin'-tackle."

"Oh, I see. That sounds more reasonable."

"As I wuz a-sayin', we went s'archin' fer ther lubberly craft, an' one day we found her off ther coast o' Greenland. Waal, sir, we wuz jist goin' ter open fire on her, when she disappeared in a fog bank. We s'arched fer a month without a findin' her. But suddenly she appeared an' we tackled her. We expected a red-hot fight an' poured broadside arter broadside inter her, but got no answerin' shot. Surprised at this we grappled her an' I went aboard, when wot d'yer think?"

"I don't think. It's too much trouble."

"Thar wuz ther hull crew dead. Come ter find out that ther werry fust shot I sent inter her blowed up ther powder magazine an' killed ther hull crew. They stood at thar posts as natural as if they wuz alive, an' I went back an' reported——"

"If all were dead, how did you find out that the first shot you fired killed them?" asked Charley, with a grin.

"Why—why," stammered Tim. "Oh, well, never mind that——"

"And if the magazine blew up why didn't it blow the ship to pieces, and send the crew up to explore the clouds?"

"Now yer gittin' werry personal."

"Answer me."

"No, I won't."

"You cant."

"I kin."

"Do."

"Not much. Yer didn't ask me right," loftily answered Tim. "If yer'd spoke different I wouldn't mind. But since yer so sassy about it I won't tell yer nuthin'."

"You couldn't please me better," chuckled Charley, walking away.

"Blast yer topleights," Tim roared after him, "if yer wuzn't so young as yer age perfects yer I'd take a reef in yer top hamper."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE RESCUE.

THE Rocket drifted along slowly until a late hour in the afternoon, when Jack, who was steering, caught sight of a party of four of the Yakuts riding away to the southward.

Below the machine there was a level plain, and the natives were going along at an easy gallop until they saw the airship.

Then they lashed their mounts and sped swiftly away.

As soon as Jack observed this action, his suspicions were aroused, and he turned to Fritz, and said:

"See there—don't that look queer?"

"Dey vos afraid ohf us, don't it?"

"We gave them no cause for fear."

"Ach, vot you tink den?"

"That they are some of the gang we saw before."

"Chasin' Iwan?"

"Yes."

Fritz scrutinized the men through a glass.

In a few moments he turned excitedly to Jack, and said:

"You don't made some mistooks apoud dot?"

"How do you know?"

"Because I recognize vun ohf dem now as der leader ohf ther mens vot vos after de poy. See der vun in white fur?"

"Yes; I remember seeing him before. He's the only one who has a beard. That's an excellent means of distinguishing him."

"If we run after him he may lead us to his village. Den if they vos got dot leedle exile, ve taken him away from dem."

Jack thought very favorably of this plan.

He steered the machine in pursuit of the riders, but did not let her go fast enough to catch up with them.

His object was merely to keep them in plain view, and as they sped along he saw them turn in their saddles, point back at the Rocket and gesticulate wildly.

It was clear that her appearance in pursuit agitated them a great deal, and they made every effort to get as far away from her as they possibly could.

Mile after mile was thus covered, and the Yakuts finally drew close to the foot hills of the mountains, and galloped among the rocks.

From their elevated position on the air-ship Jack and his crew could plainly see a village up on the mountain-side toward which the natives were swiftly going.

"There's their destination," remarked Jack, pointing at the huts. "It's a very large settlement, too."

The ground was covered with snow and ice, and yet the horses went over it with the greatest of ease, as they were accustomed to this mode of traveling.

Dashing up into the encampment, the four riders aroused all the inhabitants by their cries.

Out swarmed the fur-clad men, women and children, and the riders pointing up at the Rocket showed them the flying machine.

Then a rush was made for the houses.

All hands disappeared inside.

Within a few moments though, the Yakuts had armed themselves, and thrusting the barrels of their weapons out the windows, they began to fire at the aeronauts.

A hail of bullets rattled against the hull of the air-ship but did no harm to her, and Jack stopped the machine.

She paused above the village.

"If they haven't got some special reason for attacking us this way, what do they fire for?" asked the inventor.

"Mightn't it be fear o' ther Rocket?" asked Tim, who had just then come in with Charley.

"Perhaps; but I don't think superstition has as much to do with it as an ulterior fear. I'm going to drive the whole dusky crew out of the village, and then search the place."

"How?" asked Charley.

"By means of the electric gun."

"Donner vetter! How dey vos firin' at us!"

Jack loaded the gun and sent a shot crashing down into the village at an unoccupied spot to avoid hitting the natives.

The thunderous roar of the explosion had the desired effect, for it brought the whole crowd rushing out, yelling wildly.

Another shot was fired by Jack.

It tore up the ground, and gave such a shock that the Yakuts were sent flying in all directions in a panic of fear.

They rushed away screaming and yelling, up the mountain, down the slopes, among the rocks, and into the woods.

Down settled the Rocket until she reached the ground, when Jack, Tim and Fritz hastily alighted, and searched the houses.

Nothing was seen of the missing boy.

Just as they finished the search, they heard Charley shout:

"They are getting away in their deer sledges."

"Whereabouts?" inquired Jack, hastening up to the Rocket.

"Oll there, on the other side of those rocks"

"Let's see where they are going."

"All aboard!"

Tim and Fritz hastened to get on the air ship, and Charley raised her from the ground.

The party to which the young sailor referred were half a dozen of the Yakuts who had driven off in sledges.

Jack saw them flying down the icy road of the mountain, the deers pulling the sledges with the speed of race horses.

Leveling a telescope at them the young inventor observed that there were two people on one of the sledges.

The high back of the sleigh prevented him from seeing their faces, but he observed that one of them did not wear the same sort of costume as the Yakuts.

This fact filled his mind with the impression that it might be Ivan Janova, and he steered the Rocket after that sledge.

Along they flew rapidly.

The natives soon saw that they were pursued.

Provided with long lashed whips, they goaded the deers along at the top of their speed.

Rushing down to the level ground, the whole party flew away to the eastward with extraordinary speed.

The animals were no match for the flying machine though, and she quickly forged up to them.

Jack had retained the telescope.

As the Rocket hovered over the two-man sledge, he directed the glass at it again, and shouted gleefully:

"There's Ivan now—on that sledge with the Yakut—bound hand and foot!"

"Hurroar!" bellowed Tim.

"Lower the Rocket, Charley."

"Vatch me trop dot deer und stob 'em!" cried Fritz.

He seized a rifle, and going up on deck, aimed at the animal that was harnessed to the sledge drawing Ivan.

Bang! went the shot.

Down went the deer, and the sledge stopped.

The other sledges rushed ahead and left the one behind on which were the boy and the chief of the Yakuts.

The Rocket was swooping down toward it.

As soon as the chief saw his deer fall dead he bounded from the sledge, rushed up to the nearest one, sprang on with its driver, and was carried swiftly away.

Down to the ground settled the Rocket, and Jack alighted and running over to Ivan, cut his bonds.

"Mr. Wright!" joyfully cried the boy as he arose.

"So we've found you at last!" laughed Jack.

"I've been a prisoner with the Yakuts ever since you last saw me," said the boy.

"Tell me all about your adventures," said Jack, "and then I will give you some remarkably good news."

The boy glanced at the receding sledges.

"No danger of them returning I see," he remarked.

"None in the least," Jack replied. "They are afraid of the electric gun. Besides, if they did come back, we would not allow them to take you away from us."

"God bless you for your kindness. Mr. Wright. Now you know how I got away with the soldiers' drosky? Well, I had not gone far when one of the horses fell, broke its leg, and pulled another one down. I loosened the third horse's traces, mounted its back, and rode away. I hid myself, and had a hard time of it without food. The Yakuts finally discovered me. They wanted to steal my horse. Chasing me into the woods, they caught me. Then they took me to the village you attacked. There I was kept a prisoner, for they feared I might betray them to the authorities as thieves. The rest you know—your attack made them carry me away. But it did them no good."

"You have had a bad time of it."

"Very bad, sir. And now, what is the news you have for me?"

"I have captured Peter Darinka, forced him to write a confession of his guilt, and as the Czar, whom I spoke to in St. Petersburg, assured me he would vindicate you, if proof of your innocence was established, you will now gain your rights."

The boy was astonished and delighted.

They went aboard the Rocket, and there Tim, Fritz, and

Charley shook hands with the boy and heartily congratulated him over his escape.

"We have no more work to do in this section of the country now," said Jack, "so let us be off."

"How about the old hermit's treasure?" anxiously asked Charley.

"We will go right there and get it."

"Good enough! That will end our work here."

As Ivan passed Darinka and the villain saw the boy, he gave utterance to a startled exclamation.

He saw that the boy had been rescued, and it filled him with complete dismay, for that would put an end to all his hopes of doing anything to save himself.

The boy cast a defiant glance at his enemy, and passed on without saying a word to him.

Jack entered the wheel room.

He then sent the Rocket flying in the direction indicated by Charley, and they sped swiftly away to the southwest.

CHAPTER XX.

CONCLUSION.

"Good Lord, the gold mine has been discovered, Mr. Wright!"

"Yes, there's a large crowd of Cossacks in possession of the hut."

It was on the second day after the preceding events occurred, when Jack and Charley gave utterance to these remarks.

They stood on deck, watching the scene below.

A great mountain towered up ahead of them, which on that side ended in a mighty range of cliffs several hundred feet high.

There was a growth of timber at the base of the cliffs, in the midst of which stood a lonely log cabin, which Charley said was the place where he had found the treasure.

Swarming around the hut was a crowd of Cossacks, who had their horses tethered among the trees.

A despairing feeling took possession of the sailor, for the Cossacks were making trips in and out of the hut, each one carrying a heavy weight, which he deposited outside the hut.

When Jack glanced at these articles with the glass, he saw that they were yellow, molded bars of metal looking like gold.

"They've found the treasure!" Charley exclaimed.

"Sure enough; and they are removing it from the cave down in the mine, of which you spoke to me."

"Mr. Wright, as that gold belongs to me by right of first discovery, I don't intend to let them carry it away."

"By no means," said Jack. "We have just arrived here in time to save the stuff. We'll have to drive them away."

"How—with the gun?"

"Yes; that's the only way. We can't parley with them, as none of us understand their language."

And so saying Jack went below.

He sent an explosive projectile flying down to the ground, where it burst with a loud report.

That stopped the work going on there.

The Cossacks dashed out and saw the air-ship.

She was darting down toward them, and they made a wild rush for their horses, loosened their tethers, bounded into the saddle, and raced away at the top of their speed.

When the air-ship got close to the ground she paused and flew after the yelling and frightened horde.

In this manner she chased them several leagues.

Several times they shot back at her, but their missiles did no damage, and when Jack was sure they were well disposed of he turned the Rocket and sent her back to the hut.

There she alighted.

As Charley said, the bars of metal were gold.

A large number of them had been taken from the mine, and our friends lost no time at stowing them aboard the Rocket.

They then entered the hut.

In the middle of the room was an open trap.

Provided with lanterns, they went through it, descended a flight of stone stairs, and following a tunnel, entered a big cave.

Here stood a large stack of the golden bars.

At one side of the cavern was every evidence of the place having been mined, for there a vein of gold was found in the wall, and on the ground before it some mining tools.

"Let us carry out this gold," said Jack. "If the Cossacks come back and want any of the ore they'll have to mine it."

"Will the air-ship carry so much weight?" asked Charley.

"She is rated to lift three tons more than she now carries under full gas pressure," Jack replied.

"There can't be more than two tons of the stuff all told."

"Just my estimate. Of course she can't rise high with such weight. But she can transport it."

"Well, that's all we want, sir."

"Get to work!"

They then carried out the gold.

It occupied several hours to transfer it to the air-ship, but the work was finally finished.

Then they all went aboard.

Nothing more was seen of the Cossacks.

"Now for St. Petersburg," said Jack. "We will sell the gold, put Peter Dariinka in the hands of the law, vindicate the boy exile, and then return to Wrightstown."

They were obliged to manufacture as much gas as the reservoirs would hold in order to raise the air-ship fifty feet from the ground, and once she was elevated the propellers were started.

Jack turned her bow to the northwest.

Away she flew, and a long journey followed.

No disagreeable incidents occurred to mar the pleasure of their trip, and they finally reached the Imperial City.

The second advent of the wonderful flying machine in their midst caused the most intense excitement in the Russian capital.

She arrived in the broad light o' day, during a public parade of the city troops at the head of whom rode the Czar.

The whole population had turned out to witness the great military display, and the arrival of the air-ship created a tremendous sensation among the populace.

She was instantly surrounded.

When the Czar reached the spot, he reined in his magnificent horse, and Jack saluted him in a becoming manner from the deck of the Rocket, and said:

"Your majesty, I have returned to redeem my pledge."

"Call at the palace in an hour!" said the Czar.

He then rode on.

At the appointed time, Jack went to the palace with Ivan.

They encountered the Emperor in his audience chamber, and Jack thereupon told him all that had transpired.

In conclusion, he said, pointing at Ivan:

"And this is the boy exile."

"Can you prove your assertion of his innocence?" asked the Czar.

"Yes, sir," replied Jack, withdrawing Darinka's written confession from his pocket, and handing it to the ruler.

"Here is the evidence, signed by a number of witnesses."

The Czar read it slowly.

When he finished, he said:

"This is entirely satisfactory; the lieutenant who signed this paper is one of my most trusted officers. I see that a grave error has been made by the police; this poor boy has been wronged. But the matter shall be rectified at once. Where is Darinka?"

"A prisoner, aboard my air-ship," replied Jack.

"I shall send the police for him. Wait here."

The Czar then left the room.

In the course of an hour he returned.

"Well, sir?" asked Jack, expectantly.

"It is all arranged; Darinka is in prison; he will receive

the full penalty of the law; this boy shall have the title and fortune left to him; my private secretary will take charge of him and put him in the care of the lawyer who has the adjustment of his affairs. I am very glad you had no trouble in securing the release of your ship and crew from my officials in the Gulf of Obi."

Jack soon afterward took his departure.

Ivan had been put in the lawyer's care.

Having told his friends what happened Jack then set about disposing of the gold.

This was very easily done.

An enormous sum of money was realized from the sale.

Charley insisted upon sharing it equally among the four, and our friends therefore each received a large amount.

On the following day, the newspapers contained an account of the execution of Peter Darinka.

He had paid the penalty of his crimes.

In the afternoon, a carriage dashed up to the Rocket and out of it jumped Ivan and his newly appointed guardian.

They boarded the air-ship.

"I was so afraid you might depart before I could see you again," panted the boy. "I've been detained at settling the legal business connected with my inheritance."

"Then everything is all right?" asked Jack.

"Yes, sir. The patronage of the Czar, which you secured for me, has worked wonders," replied the boy. "I have been restored to my rights, and, as you perhaps already know, my enemy has been executed after a very short trial."

"They did not lose any time about disposing of him."

"That's a fact. I now wish to express my gratitude."

"It is unnecessary, Ivan. I am sufficiently repaid by seeing you happy and out of all your trouble."

"I shall never forget your kindness, sir."

After some further conversation they shook hands and parted.

There was a long journey home ahead of our friends, so they sent the Rocket up that evening, and she was steered away to the west and finally reached the Atlantic.

She crossed the ocean without any difficulty, and in due time our friends sighted the shore of America and descended toward Wrightstown in the early morning sunlight.

Once the Rocket was put away in the workshop, her crew felt that their long journey was over.

They were warmly greeted by friends and relations, and the parrot and monkey were put in Jack's house.

After that the Rocket was taken apart, and stored.

Charley gave up the sea, and as he was now very rich, he settled in Wrightstown to lead a life of ease and comfort.

Jack's ship had returned safely, and the fishing company were grateful to the inventor for saving the vessel.

With nothing further to do but follow his natural taste for inventing, Jack finally began to devise another machine to go by electricity, and soon had his plans ready to build it.

In this work he was ably assisted by Tim and Fritz, for all three were fond of a roving, adventurous life, and were anxious to be off again in search of wild excitement.

The new invention was a wonder, and they never had a more adventurous journey than the one they finally made in it.

But we must reserve a description of it for the sequel which will soon follow, and pause here.

[THE END.]

THE DIME NOVEL CLUB

Charles Bragin, Secretary

1525 WEST 12TH STREET, BROOKLYN 4, NEW YORK.

JACK WRIGHT

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Most of the stories were written by the same author, Lu Senarens, under his pen name of "Noname".

The stories first appeared in Boys Star Library No. 216, ending with No. 379, from 1890 to 1896. Some were later on reprinted in Pluck & Luck.

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